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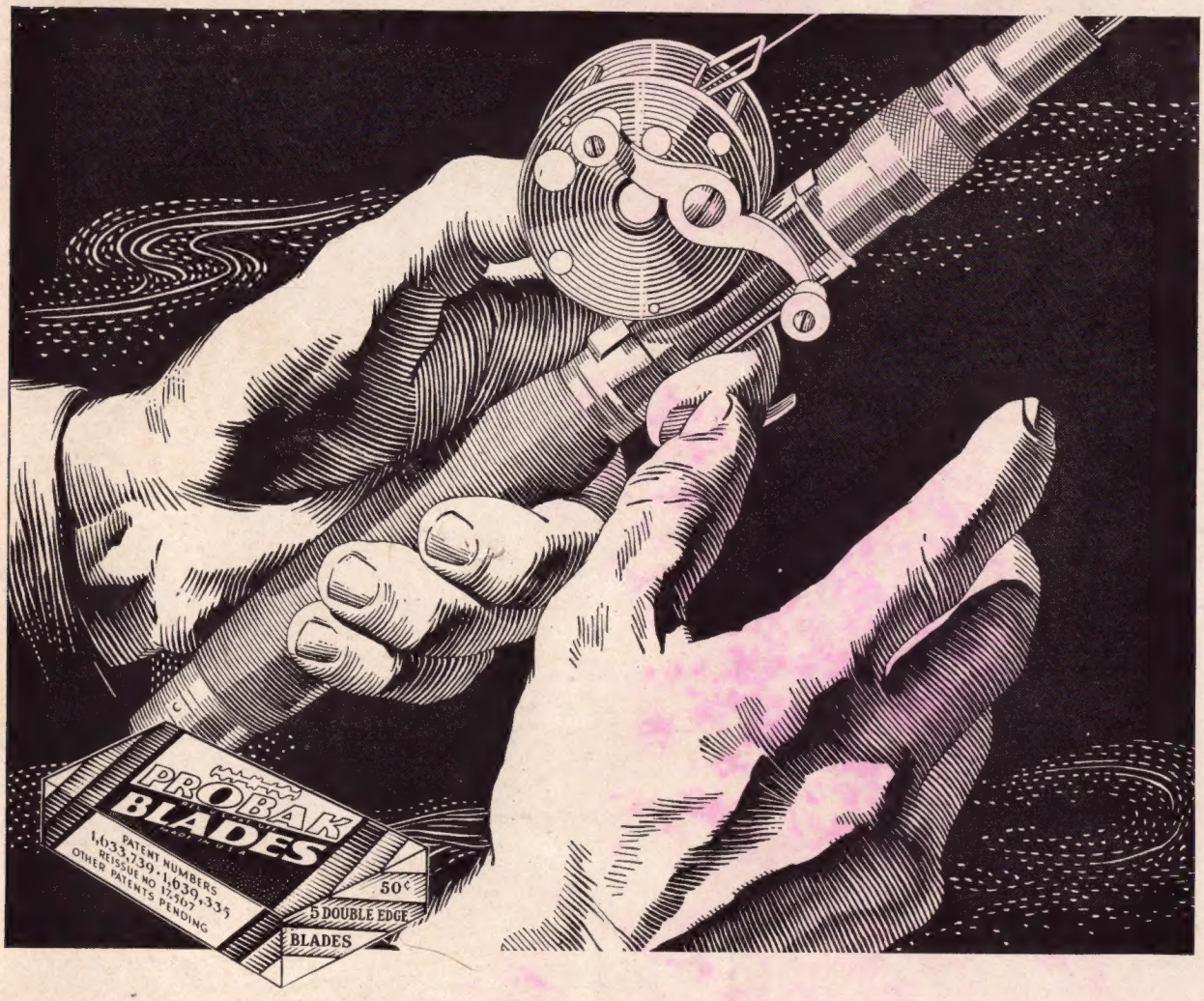

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Beginning a Two-Part Story

CHAPTER I

THE WANDERER

THE bearded man, crawling along the nightbound jungle path, suddenly dodged sidewise. A taut vine under his left hand had snapped. Instantly something beside the narrow trail had struck at him.

Now that assailant stood motionless. Peering tensely up at it, the huddled wanderer made out only a truncated sapling from which projected long spikes.

Stiff, still, semi-visible against the dense undergrowth, it seemed incapable of the fierce thrust it had just loosed against the prowler. But the snap of that liana under his palm, the abrupt noise of smitten leaves above his head, had proved the guilt of this inanimate length of wood. And for a few seconds he glared at it, as if facing a human assassin. Then he switched his attention to the leafy labyrinth around him.

Nothing new met eyes or ears. At his right, brilliant moonlight sprayed, through lofty foliage somewhat thinned by the broad cut of a silent creek; and, spreading vaguely across the path, vanished into impenetrable blackness at his left. Amid the myriad shadows his dilated pupils discerned no motion. Nor could concentrated listening detect any near sound. Far away, faintly heard, some ugly howling monkey hurled

of the Amazon Jungle

DARK TRAILS

By ARTHUR O. FRIEL

harshness at all his savage world. Elsewhere hung silence thick as the dark.

Tight muscles relaxing, the nocturnal traveler looked again at the fanged thing which had leaped erect to kill, but had struck too high. Slowly he straightened up from the knees; still more slowly, to his feet. Now, instead of a creeping creature on all fours, he was a tall, lank man, black bearded but white faced; powerfully framed but wofully weak; clothed but hatless; belted with cartridges but empty holstered. The long revolver which belonged in that holster was stowed under his waistband at the extreme rear, in the small of his back; a spot inconvenient for an upstanding walker, but, for a crawling cripple, better than an awkwardly dangling sheath.

Erect, he stood on his left leg, barely resting the right on the ground. Something had happened to that right limb; something which prevented walking. Letting it hang limp, he inspected the striker from the dark.

It was a small tree trunk, perhaps three inches thick, cut off six feet above ground. To its upper length were firmly fixed several wooden prongs, each a foot long and sharpened to a spearlike point. From its rear ran a strong vine, now loose. Parting the bushes, he found a short horizontal pole lashed to two tree trunks. Across this bar hung the tip of the broken vine. The thing was a murderous spring trap, which, when released by an unwary foot, would drive its wicked spikes deep into the chest of a tall man, or the throat or face of a short one.

The steely eyes of the wanderer glinted, and through his scrubby beard his teeth glimmered in a mirthless grin. Sinking again to hands and knees, he resumed his slow, slithering progress through the gloomy maze.

For a time he kept his head up and his gaze alert. Then his hollow face sank, and his eyes rested dully on the almost invisible footway which wormed ever on. His dogged, dragging motions were mechanical, lifeless, as if he were but a broken machine, forced to continue an aimless course by some senseless motor not yet quite drained of fuel. Hand over hand, knee after knee, hopelessly yet ceaselessly he dragged toward whatever might wait at the end.

At last he stopped again, his heavy head sharply rising. Into the air had come a low, queer sound; a sound seemingly compounded of murmuring voices and a ceaseless dry swish. Moonlight, much stronger than along the shadowy creek bank, splashed through trees beneath which was no undergrowth. Beyond must be a clear space—and human life.

With the sudden acceleration of a famished animal scenting food, he shambled forward. A few rods farther on he paused once more, eyes tight, scowling, peering into the brightness flooding a wide hole in the tall timber. In the middle of that bare ground stood a large circular house.

From within that house came the noises he had heard. The murmuring sound, now louder, was unmistakably vocal—a continuous cadence resembling a monotonous chant, rather high pitched. The dry undertone was unexplainable.

Outside was no life. After a long look at the broad domicile, at several smaller shelters, and at all the bare ground, the weary crawler moved forward once more. To the big structure he crept, and beside it he stopped, peering through its wall.

That wall, made from vertical logs of strong *chonta* palm, had many narrow slits between the poles. On the earth floor inside burned a small, smoky fire. Around this giver of light and repeller of insects circled dark, nude shapes.

Hand in hand, long hair loose, faces intent, steps measured, they trotted in an endless ring. Around their waists flapped girdles of snail shells, producing that swishing noise which had puzzled the listener. From their open mouths droned unintelligible words which seemed mere gibberish, yet, constantly repeated, became a tuneless refrain. In their voices, their faces, their methodical movements was no joyousness. Plainly this crude jungle dance was not a celebration but a ritual performed for some obscure purpose.

ALL those shapes were female. As the starved watcher outside realized this, he grinned again through his beard; the same hard grin he had given the death trap down the trail. Again he crawled onward, seeking a door.

He found none. Everywhere arose the same unbroken circuit of poles. Although at least one exit must exist, it now was so cunningly concealed that his search could not discern it. Obviously the habitants, who could have conducted their strange ceremony more freely and coolly in the bright moonlight, were habitually wary against enemies.

Scowling, he stopped again and rose to his knees, hand going back to his gun butt. A shot fired high between the poles would halt the dancing women, scare them into a rush for their hidden door. Then he could compel them to feed and care for him until—

The thought stopped short. So did the half drawn weapon. Peering in again, he had spied several things not noticed at his other, lower viewpoint. The women were not alone. He now looked into the faces of a number of men—alive and dead.

The living ones, nine in number, squatted side by side against a part of the wall previously obscured by the circling bodies. Bare to the waist, they had their legs wrapped in skirt-like cloths. Long haired, each wore three pigtails—a long, thick braid down the back, two small ones at the temples.

Through their ear lobes were thrust tubes of yellow cane. Slit eyed, cruel mouthed, wrinkled, all were old men; too old for the warpath, but by no means too senile to attack a near enemy. On the contrary, they probably would fight with more deadly ferocity and sagacity than young warriors.

All now were phlegmatically watching the women, slowly chewing tobacco and swallowing the juice. For a bare second the desperate white man considered the possibility of creeping around behind them and, by fast work, shooting six in the backs; then reloading to meet the survivors. But, with a jerk of the head, he cast that idea aside. His eyes turned to the faces of the dead men.

Faces without bodies, these were. Faces without even skulls or skeletons. Leering faces of shrunken heads, no larger than oranges, hanging clustered around the thick central post upholding the conical roof. Dull colored, devilish faces with eyes shut, mouths stretched, long hair rising high to pegs whence they were suspended. Faces which once had been those of strong savages, stealthy hunters, canny rovers of this grim Amazonian jungle; now mere hollow shells.

The face of the man outside contracted in revulsion. His eyes glinted again as they swung over the circling, mouthing women. This was a community of Jiveros, headhunters. The diminutive heads were *tsantsas,* trophies. The warriors now were out on another raid. In their absence, their women were performing the traditional *ihiambrama,* the nightly war dance, chanting the magic formula intended to give their men victory.

"She devils!" he muttered.

Then he glanced at the sluggishly chewing men. His face tightened still more. One of them had stopped chewing and was looking straight at him.

Although the low spoken epithet could not have been heard through the ceaseless chorus, something had impinged on some sense of that habitually suspicious old assassin. And now, although the outsider could not be distinguishable through smoke and logs, the veteran was about to investigate. His narrow gaze and rigid posture foretold action.

Until he moved, his unseen adversary remained equally motionless, calculating chances. When the lank Indian arose, the lank white man withdrew. The odds were too great. Headhunter women were known to fight like men on their home grounds, and to be even more vindictive. If that whole horde should rush forth, it could be stopped by nothing less than a machine gun.

Toward the nearest adjacent hut he dragged himself. Unlike some of the other outbuildings, it was not merely a roof on poles, but log walled. Behind this curving cover he crawled at top speed. Out of sight, he paused a moment, gritting his teeth; he had hurt his bad leg. Then, jaws locked, he crept farther, stopping again at a spot where he could watch the big building. Head on the ground, hand on his gun, he waited.

Only a few seconds passed before he saw dark shapes steal around the ceremonial house. Silent as ghosts, long spears advanced, they sneaked along the wall from both directions; all the men, divided into two parties, closing in to catch any lurking foe between them. Meanwhile, the female war chant continued unchanged. Absorbed in their ceremony, the women had not noticed the withdrawal of their protectors.

Meeting, the men relaxed, stood quiet for several minutes, keenly scanned all surroundings. Then, with no discernible conversation, they filed away and were gone, obviously reassured.

For some minutes longer the prone intruder lay as he was. No returning investigator appeared. No break came in the interminable repetition of voices and rattling of shells. At length he sat up, rested his back against the near pole wall and morosely contemplated his hurt leg.

"Damn the luck!" he ejaculated.

The curse was no subdued mutter, but a recklessly loud rebellion against fate. He could travel no farther; and here, at the end of his hazardous trail, was no help. Yet he was not ready to quit. Even as he swore, he looked up and about him, seeking some new line to food and shelter.

The hut against which he was leaning seemed empty. To right and left were only open pole sheds. But he remembered two or three other closed places, beyond the tribe house, which might be animal pens, hen coops, or something of the sort. And somewhere else there might be—

"Plantation!" he guessed. "There's got to be one! Bananas and things. They'd help. But where is it?"

Again he was speaking aloud. His tired eyes scanned the black jungle, finding no opening toward cultivated crops; failing, indeed, to make out even the path by which he had come here. But something told him where that path lay, and whispered that the plantation might lie across the creek bordering that trail. And, after another interval of rest, he grimly concentrated on the task of carrying on.

"Come on!" he grunted, slowly moving. "Let's go!"

Then he froze. Behind the poles at his back sounded a faint shuffle. And through the wall came a tense, harsh whisper—

"Who is there?"

CHAPTER II

SCAR FACE

DUMB, the outsider sat with body twisted, eyes over shoulder, staring at the curving barrier. Constructed less carefully than the wall of the tribe house, it had wider gaps between crooked poles. But inside was no light, and the speaker remained invisible.

Again came the hoarse demand—

"Who is there?"

Louder now, it sounded a little beyond his right shoulder. Creeping over, he peered between other upright logs. Now he discerned something crouched close beside the wooden bars. It seemed to be white.

"Who wants to know?" he challenged.

The man inside made no answer for a long minute. Then he chuckled. The chuckle quickened, deepened, became a hysterical laugh. Abruptly it stopped. Loud, rapid breaths followed, hissing through teeth locked in an effort at self-control; subsided, ended in the quiet words—

"Come to the door."

"What door?"

"I'll show you."

The crouching shape arose, walked across the floor, stopped, knocked on poles. The outsider crawled around to that spot, which fronted the tribe house. Warily looking and listening, he saw no lurking watchers at the big domicile, heard nothing but the incessant female conjuration. From within the small shelter sounded more knocks, increasingly impatient. Regarding the rounded wall, he saw no door. The circuit of poles was unbroken.

"Where is it?" he growled.

"Here!" snapped the voice within. "There is a bush lock. Unlock it! Here, I say!"

A finger tip moved between poles, tapping a piece of tough liana looped in crisscross coils around half a dozen of the logs. Studying that bond, the cripple spied a cunning knot, hard drawn, yet easily loosed from the outside. Forthwith he untangled it. Then, grasping the wall, he heaved himself to his feet.

"It's loose," he curtly announced.

A pole moved, swinging sidewise from the top. Two more swung in the same direction. Then three others slid the other way. Thus opened a triangular space like an inverted V; a true Jivero door, indistinguishable from outside, too narrow at the top to admit a standing man, forcing any entrant to stoop and

thereby hampering his attack; the same sort of hidden portal which, no doubt, existed in the seemingly unpierced wall of the tribe house.

With the swinging of the sixth stick, a bent creature sidled through the opening and straightened up. Moving his head slowly, he anxiously asked—

"Where are you?"

The other stared, speechless. He saw a short man without hair, without eyes, almost without a face.

Bald as an egg, his scalp glistened in the moonlight. Empty, his eye sockets seemed vainly seeking sight. Frightfully scarred, minus half his nose, puckered by raggedly healed slashes, what remained of his countenance was a repellent wreck.

His body, on the contrary, seemed unmarred. Nude, very white in the pallid moonshine, it showed no wounds. Moreover, it was full fleshed, indicating that he was well fed.

His twisted mouth moved again in sharp demand—

"Where are you, I say?"

"Right here." The shocked beholder recovered himself. "Got anything to eat?"

"Eat? Plenty, plenty. Er—come in."

The invitation was a trifle reluctant. As the short fellow drew back he added—

"Eat fast."

Without answer, the other hobbled through. In his eagerness he put too much weight on his injured leg. A streak of pain wrung from him a short groan. The blind man, now moving toward something across the room, halted.

"Are you hurt?" he questioned.

"Can't walk. Broke my ankle."

"The devil!"

Heavy dismay loaded the blind man's voice. For a second or two he stood as if about to order the cripple out and away. But then he moved onward.

Vision adjusted to the interior darkness, the wanderer made out a low Jivero bed of woven withes, a small slab table, a crude stool, a couple of clay jars, a hanging shelf of poles, a bunch of bananas—his inspection stopped there. Crawling again, he made for that cluster of fruit.

"When did you eat last?" queried the short fellow.

"Three days ago."

"Hm! Then go slow! Here!"

From the hanging shelf he drew a small haunch of monkey meat.

"Chew it well," he warned. "Drink water. Then wait awhile. There is plenty of time."

TEETH already tearing at the cold roast, the other made no answer. But he forced himself to heed the advice. The blind man, moving as surely as if gifted with sight, put beside him a jar of water; then returned to the entrance and set the poles once more upright. Evidently he knew, somehow, that the moon was shining and that therefore any savage who might emerge from the tribe house would detect his open doorway.

Returning, he took from his bed a long cloth, wrapped it around him and sat down. There he remained motionless and wordless until, with a gurgle of water and a hungry sigh, the famished man finished the piece of flesh.

"No more," he then warned. "Now come here."

"What for?"

"I want to see what you look like."

The long man stared. Then, saying nothing, he crept forward. Within arm's length he stopped and straightened to his knees.

"Here I am," he said. "Take a good look."

At once the other's hands rose. Fingertips felt the stranger's head, features, shoulders, chest; went down his sides, halted at the cartridge belt. Then one hand slid quickly to the empty holster; halted again, felt around, dropped away. On the dim visage showed a deep scowl.

"Humph! No legs, no gun! You're not of much use to me!" grumbled the

sightless man.

"What did you expect to use me for?" countered the other.

"To get me out of here. Don't think I'm living here from choice, do you?"

"Hardly. But what did you think you'd do with my gun if you'd found it?"

"Do with it? I? Nothing. What could I hit? But if you had one and could do my seeing and shooting—"

He stopped.

"Well, what then?"

The disfigured visage twitched in an unreadable expression.

"Never mind. Who are you? How did you get here?"

Before answering, the newcomer moved aside and rested his back against the wall, sliding his undetected revolver into a side pocket. Thus comfortably disposed, he said:

"Jeff Driscoll's my name. Came down the Rio Santiago, prospecting. Had bad luck all the way. Found no gold worth mentioning. Our crew of mountain Indians deserted. Bill and I—that's Bill Haynes, my partner—we came on alone, washing sand now and then, still hoping for a strike. Then Bill got sick. We quit prospecting and paddled hard for the Amazon. Bill was bow paddle. He must have shut his eyes or gone blind or something. Anyway, he ran us smack on to a low snag that I couldn't see from aft. We capsized. Lost everything, including Bill. He couldn't swim, and never came up. While I was diving for him the paddles drifted so far downstream that I couldn't get them again. So I had to swim ashore. Then I slipped on a slimy root, took a fall, snapped my ankle. Since then I've just been crawling around. Couldn't shoot anything to eat, because, crawling, I was too clumsy to get near any—"

"What's that? You had a gun?"

The swift interruption halted the concise narrative. Driscoll scowled slightly; then admitted:

"Yes, I had a gun, fellow. And I still have it."

"Why the devil didn't you say so?"

"Because you were too damned anxious to get your paws on it, that's why. And don't go poking at my belt again like you did, *hombre*. I stood for it once, but twice is too much."

The warning came with a surety betokening revived strength. The monkey haunch, though small, had been rich in nutriment; and the eater, although even more hungry now that appetite had been tantalized, was much less weak.

The ugly countenance near him quirked queerly. Suddenly it stretched in a hissing laugh.

"Afraid of me?" jeered the eyeless captive. "That's rich! Afraid of *me!*"

He rocked back and forth, his squeaky mirth taking on the hysterical quality once previously manifested. Then, as before, he cut it short. Hands gripping knees, he sat rigid, regaining restraint.

Driscoll, watching with eyes narrowing, did not bother to reply. He felt that the other was somewhat crazed.

After a long moment of silence the blind man seemed to sense the cripple's thought. His hold on his knees relaxed. Calmly he said:

"You are quite wrong, in more ways than one. I don't want to get your gun—although I'd love to feel one again. And I'm not insane—not after sundown. During the day I'm crazy as the devil. Crazy like a fox. Understand?"

"Not quite."

"No? Do you know where you are?"

"In a headhunter settlement."

"Exactly. And does that mean anything to you?"

Driscoll considered. Slowly light dawned.

"Oh, you mean these people don't kill crazy men?"

"Usually not."

"Looks to me as if they'd tried damn hard."

The ruined face twitched again. A hand rose, passed across the old gashes, dropped away.

"This is my own fault. I walked right into it. Did you meet anything

along the path?"

The tall man's mouth tightened. Again he felt the snap of the treacherous liana under his palm, heard the terrific thrust of the upshooting row of spear points, saw the diabolical trap stand stark overhead. And now, looking at the fearful work of that savage contrivance, he felt a chill crawl up his spine. This short fellow had taken in the face a stroke like the one which he himself, if standing, would have received full in the chest.

"I see," he assented. "I met the same thing. But I was crawling, you know."

"You're lucky. So was I, perhaps. I happened to be looking partly away from the thing. If it had hit me fair, it would probably have gone through my skull. Instead, it just put me in a nice comfortable asylum. He-he-he-ha-ha—Here! Stop that!"

Again the rising cachinnation was cut short. Jaws clenched, the captive sat silent. Outside, the wearisome jabbering of female voices and shaking of shells continued. Driscoll scowled hatefully toward the malevolent noise.

"Devils!" he muttered. Then, curiously, "Why didn't they take off your head?"

"Not worth taking. No face, no hair. To these people the hair is the most important part of the *tsantsa*. A fine hairy white man's head like yours, now—they'd love that." The bald fellow chuckled again, with a touch of malice. "But I'd lost all mine—hair, beard, brows, everything—in a bad fever years before then, and it had never grown out again. And, besides, I was clean crazy when they found me. So would you be, after taking that wallop. And a crazy man's supposed to be more or less in touch with the demons who rule these people's lives. So, for one reason and another, they let me live. Since then I've stayed insane by daylight, while they could see me. Crazy like a fox, yes. Crazy enough to keep alive and wait for my chance."

DRISCOLL eyed him sidewise. Various questions arose in his mind, including what the victim meant by his "chance". Chance at escape? Chance at revenge? But he withheld these queries. He was figuring on his own chances; and, obviously, unless this unfortunate continued to help him, he had none.

"Uh-huh. You're foxy, all right," he complimented. "And it looks as if I'm your chance. But I've got to get my legs under me before we can do anything."

The other seized the bait. Although the unseen stranger had promised nothing, the inference of partnership was effective as the adroit cast of an artificial fly before an eager trout.

"Yes, of course," he agreed. "And—Let me see that ankle."

His hands groped. Driscoll moved nearer, extending his useless leg, placing one of those searching hands on it. The questing fingers slid to the swollen joint, paused, felt slowly, softly, around it, below it, above it. Driscoll set his teeth. The recurrent pressures, though gentle, hurt damnably. But he made no sound.

"The other one," presently ordered the prisoner.

Silently the injured man put out the other leg. That leg, like the first, was bare under the trousers; he had long ago abandoned his high boots as useless drags.

The perceptive fingertips went over ankle and foot, then up the strong calf to the knee; shifted again to the injured limb and felt it over, judging contrasts between good and bad. Then they arose and rested in the folds of the blind man's blanket. Head still forward, face still downturned, the investigator sat mute, sunk in thought.

Driscoll, too, remained wordless. In that handling of his legs had been the deft touch of experienced skill, acquired long before this wreck had lost physical vision. And now the studious silence

of the handler suggested a diagnosis. So, unlike most patients, who must make talk and thus do their inane worst to confuse a physician's judgment, Driscoll held his tongue.

At length the bowed head lifted sharply.

"It is not broken. It is a bad sprain, made much worse by what you have suffered since. If you will do exactly what I say, you may soon walk again."

"Well, what do you say?" asked Driscoll.

"I say that now you may eat a little more, then lie down and sleep. At the right time I will wake you. Then we shall take the next steps. What do you say to that?"

"Sounds all right to me, Doctor."

The blind man stiffened.

"Why do you call me doctor?" he rasped.

"Huh? Well, why not?"

The mutilated face contracted. Without reply, the short man arose, plucked a couple of bananas from the bunch, passed them over, then walked to the masked door and stood quiet, perhaps listening, perhaps only evading more talk.

Eagerly eating, Driscoll said no more. When he had devoured the starchy nourishment which somewhat balanced the meat ration, he drank again. With a thin grin at the waiting figure, he shifted his gun again to the middle of his back. Then, lying flat on it, sure that no sly fingers could abstract it while he slept, he relaxed.

CHAPTER III

BLIND SIGHT

WITH a moaning cry Driscoll sat up and struck.

A huge, hideous thing had swung silently down from a black tree, seized his shoulders, yanked him off his legs and begun shaking him. Its horrible face grinned fixedly into his own, and—

"Wake up, you idiot!"

The grisly thing shrank. The black jungle became a dark hut. The clutch on his shoulders was real, and so was the shaking. But the demon of nightmare was only the short blind man, striving to arouse the sleeper.

"Wake up—and shut up!"

The warning tone was a harsh whisper. The dreamer, now thoroughly awake, looked around and listened. The noise at the tribe house had died; utter silence ruled the savage settlement. The moon still shone, but its light now struck only the upper lengths of the westward poles of the hut. The time must be near morning.

"All right," he quietly assented. "What's the excitement?"

The hold on his shoulders loosened. The captive stepped back, rubbing his chest. Hazily Driscoll remembered that his wild punch had hit something. Now he understood where that blow had landed.

"Sorry," he apologized.

"Never mind. But don't do it again." The gashed face twisted in a faint grin. "If you can hit like that now, I don't want to take what you can hand out when you're stronger. Now listen. Time is short."

"O. K. Shoot."

Driscoll glanced around again and hunched forward. At once the other went on:

"Answering your question, there's no excitement yet, but there will be if you're caught here. So you must get out.

"I've given you all the time there was, Driscoll. While you slept, I've been thinking. And all I can do for you now is to feed you again and tell you where to go. You can't hide hereabouts. The dogs, which are shut up at night to save them from jaguars, but are free by day, would smell you and give you away. And I can't build a fire and heat water, which your ankle needs. I'm blind and crazy, remember; so I'm not allowed access to fire, weapons, or any-

thing else dangerous. I am watched by day, locked up by night. And, by the way, when you go you must try to tie that bush lock at the door as it was before. I hope your memory is good."

He paused. Driscoll answered:

"I'll try. Go on."

"Your only chance," swiftly resumed the prisoner, "is to reach a small hut about a mile from here, at the northeast. There is a faint foot track leading toward it. The track begins behind the second shed at your right, as you go out. To find and follow it is your job. If you reach that hut, you will find in it a young warrior taking his first devil dream. Dispose of him. He has food and other things. Use them. Nobody will disturb you—unless enemies come hunting heads here. You must guard yourself against that. The people of this place will not come near you. Now start!"

He stepped back. Driscoll blinked, frowned, demurred:

"You're too fast for me. What's that devil dream stuff? And why won't anybody bother me?"

"Never mind that. Get going! The moon is low, and you need every minute. These people will be getting up; the dogs will be loosed at daybreak. Out with you!"

Driscoll started doorward. As he crawled along, the other walked beside him, adding:

"You have six days. Boil out your ankle. In your shirt pocket I have put a roll of tobacco leaves. Dip some of them in the water and bind them around the joint after each hot treatment. In six days you must leave that place. Then come back here. When we meet again, I may tell you of something worth coming back for. Now, good luck to you!"

At the doorway he moved aside the uprights. Unquestioning, Driscoll crawled through. The logs swung together behind him, and he rose to refasten the knot. The job puzzled him a bit, for the intertwining had been peculiar; but after a moment of experiment he hit upon the right twists.

"O.K," he softly announced. "I'm off. And much obliged to you, partner. I'll try to come back."

"You'd better. Now go on."

The white shape beyond the bars drew back and was gone in the gloom. Driscoll, outside, then sank down and crawled away to the right. Across the bare ground he made his painful way, glancing repeatedly at the tribe house, listening for any stealthy step or sudden dog bark. None came.

Behind the second shed the creeper scouted, finding soon an almost invisible trace leading off into the forest. And into that forest he vanished.

In the big house, savages wearied by malevolent ceremonies slept blindly. In the small one their white captive lay on his stick bed and stared sightlessly upward. In a far hut a young killer, who had not yet made his kill, dreamed of murder. Somewhere still farther away, his elder hunters of heads slumbered on their sneaky warpath. And of them all, only one glimpsed some of the actual happenings a week ahead. He was the man without eyes.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEVIL DREAMER

BESIDE a black brook stood a small round hut of poles and palm. Inside it, on a stick bed, a lanky young Jivero lay drugged.

Comatose, virtually cataleptic, he stared at nothing real, seeing portentous phantoms; awful shapes generated in his intoxicated brain by the narcotic *maikoa* drink of his people, the dregs of which remained in a shallow gourd at his side. To a white man, awaking the morning after a debauch, those ghastly visions would be only figments of delirium, to be banished by a cold shower bath and never willingly remembered. To this would-be assassin, as to all his strange nation, they were ghosts of his ancestors, conjured hither by the magic po-

tion to advise him before he went forth to slay; and their counsel must be treasured, interpreted, solidified into a coherent whole by days of sober study, before he could confidently face a foe.

Because of this need, he had been left behind while his elders went away on their blood trail. Not until the Arútama, the ghostly Old Ones, had come from their shadowy abode and, here in the isolated dreaming hut, given the neophyte their omens, would he be fit to stalk human quarry. And in his relegation to this obscure spot there was no disgrace. This was the orthodox procedure. Every warrior, even the chief himself, had in his day gone through the same prescribed period of communion with the ancestral demons, emerging therefrom with settled surety of his success against all antagonists.

Until such certainty had been instilled in each male Jivero by his demoniacal forefathers—and until, by searching inquisition by the tribal priest, he had proved his complete comprehension of their protection—he was not yet competent to hunt a head. And if his effort to win such assurance failed, that was not his fault. He must simply wait, try again, until the cantankerous old souls obeyed the order of the *maikoa*.

Hence, while his somewhat older tribesmen made their latest foray, this youth drank and dreamed. In his hut were weapons, food, cook pots, wood, water; but he used none of them. Not for three days and nights could he touch food or go out. At the end of that time he could cease using the drug, eat a little, unlock his door, bathe, settle his mind to contemplate and coalesce the confused meanings of the fantasies. Until those meanings became clear—or until his food was exhausted—he could remain there in meditation. Meanwhile, no relative or friend would disturb him.

Now the third night was ending. And now, unfed for seventy hours, saturated with the narcotic, he saw the most terrifying vision which had yet come. Of bodiless faces, of enormous serpents, of jaguars and vultures, of stupendous thunders and lightnings, of every exaggerated experience within his knowledge or imagination, he had beheld more than enough; and, beholding, had subconsciously striven to memorize every such vision for later reflection. All such apparitions were within the realm of actual existence or of superstitious tradition. But now came a thing totally outside all these illusions; a thing so real that his very marrow froze.

Something scratched at his pole door; the hidden door which he had tied tight with a liana knotted inside. Something worked to cut that hard vine; worked with sawings of a knife blade, faintly heard, which presently severed the bond. Then the poles moved. Through them crawled a long shape which seemed a beast, a man, a demon, all in one. Head up, eyes fixed, it dragged straight toward the bed. Between its teeth was the knife with which it had cut its way in.

At the bedside the thing reared up, standing on its knees. Its right hand jerked the knife from between its jaws. Then it was still, scowling down at the rigid dreamer.

Over its forehead hung tangled black hair. Around its mouth and jaw was scraggy black beard. Between brow and mouth was white skin, in which glinted fierce, cold eyes. It was the most unbelievable, formidable, inexorable devil which could come from the jungle to any head hunter—a desperate white man.

For an agonizingly long time he stood there, motionless. His eyes dwelt grimly on the frozen stare of the young savage; clouded a little, moved gradually down the bare form, noting its unmistakable youth; came back upward, rested once more on the taut visage, considered it anew; then hardened again. Although he spoke no word and as yet made no move, his thoughts were plain enough. His menacing gaze said that only a fool would spare a venomous snake because it happened to be young; and that be-

tween snakes and Jiveros, who mercilessly massacred old women and babes when head hunting, there was no difference. Therefore . . .

With a hiss of indrawn breath, the adolescent killer threw off the trance chaining his limbs and started up. His fingers, hooked like talons, struck at those menacing eyes. The bearded face jerked back. Across it flashed a hard white grin. At the same instant a piercing pain stabbed between brown ribs to the heart.

A yell, sharp but short, broke from the savage. He flopped back, limp, staring blankly at the roof. His fevered vision had seen its last demon.

As the first faint light of dawn stole through the pole wall, Driscoll wiped his long clasp knife on the dead man's hair, shut it with a snap and muttered:

"Thanks, brownie! That swipe at my eyes made it a lot easier."

Then, with a deep breath, he turned away and made himself at home.

DAYS and nights drifted away.

Days of soft sun, subdued by the dense canopy of foliage, cooled by the exhalations of damp earth; of sudden rains, spraying through that same verdant roof, reaching the ground without violent impact, and soon ceasing. Nights of alternate moonlight, successively weakening, and utter blackness caused by thick cloud. And, throughout days and nights, unbroken peace at the remote hut of the dead devil dreamer.

Throughout those days and nights the white devil within that hut rebuilt himself. In the new light of his first day there he removed its previous tenant. After reconnoitering the vicinity, he worked the brown body on to his back and crawled away with it into the woods, dumping it when he could bear it no farther. For a time he lay beside it, gathering strength for his return creep; then dragged himself back to shelter.

What sort of rapacious beast or reptile afterward devoured that body he never knew nor cared. It was far enough away from a path to be imperceptible to human nostrils. So, back at his sanctuary, he ate his fill of Jivero food, drank deep from the brook, treated his agonized leg with hot water, bound the ankle with wet tobacco in a ragged handkerchief, and forthwith fell asleep. Thereafter he remained unconscious for about thirty hours.

He did not lock his door, then or later. Against animals it was virtually impregnable when closed. Against men a mere knot of liana was frail defense, as he himself had proved. Wasting no worry, therefore, he left his fate to luck. And luck, which recently had treated him harshly but at last had relented, now stood by him.

The possible attack by rival head hunters, against which the blind man had warned him, did not materialize. The dogs of the settlement, which might have caught his scent on the ground and followed it up, did not appear. The ruthless old men of the tribe house, who might have decided to come and assure themselves that all went well with the solitary youth, remained at home. Thus Driscoll's existence remained unknown to all men except the one who had sent him here; the man whose name the cripple had not asked, but whom he now nicknamed Scar Face.

Concerning Scar Face or any one else he thought little during those days of recuperation. Sufficient unto those days was the fact that he had shelter, food, undisturbed rest, and nothing to do but attend to his bad ankle. That joint was, as Scar Face had said, not broken; and, as repeated treatments worked on it and plentiful nourishment and sleep restored physical vigor almost drained, it cured itself with increasing speed.

By the end of the third day Driscoll could walk, albeit with some difficulty. By the noon of the sixth he was completely himself, a strong, capable, calculating self, quite hard boiled. And,

once more self-sufficient, he planned for himself alone.

For the temporary aid of the blind fellow he was thankful; but not so grateful as he had been when in dire extremity. Then he had felt willing to rescue Scar Face from bondage, fight for him if necessary, and thus repay a debt. Now he felt that there was little debt, if any. Scar Face had made it quite evident that he meant to use the cripple for his own purposes—whatever they might be. And Driscoll, like every other man who has knocked around, had been used more than once for other men's purposes. Thus he had learned the folly of being a tool, and the wisdom of using other men while they were useful—and no longer. And now that Scar Face had served his turn, why not forget him?

Whoever Scar Face might have been, he was nobody now. The fact that he had had his face ruined was no fault of Driscoll's. The quasi-promise he had made at parting—that he might reveal something worth knowing if Driscoll came back—was, of course, only bait. What had he really done for the desperate wanderer? Nothing but give him a feed, some leaves, and advice. And what could Driscoll do with a blind man in this hellish wilderness, or afterward? Nothing. He would have a tough enough time in getting himself to the Amazon. To take on excess baggage would be suicidal. Therefore he would—he must—go it alone. He could trace his way back to the Rio Santiago, and there he would use whatever came his way, just as he had used Scar Face.

WITH this decision he began his outward journey on the afternoon of the sixth day. He started with a coldly determined stride. But after a few such paces he slowed, stopped, scowled in growing confusion. He could see no path. The trail he had followed like an animal was invisible to an erect man. Sudden panic hit him. Carefully he turned, backtracked, found the hut. There he paused awhile, regaining self-control; then sank to earth and, moving with concentrated study, recommenced his progress. Thus, humbled by the threat of the jungle to the status of a beast, he went out as he had come in, feeling his way.

When he reached the tribal clearing the sun was very low. He had not, of course, expected to cross the bare ground in daylight; and now, moving with extreme stealth, he snaked himself behind a bulky tree and lay prone, awaiting darkness. Of his ability to find and follow the other path, leading riverward, he felt confident. It bordered the creek, and thus, if traveled with unflagging care, should not be lost even in pitch-blackness; and late in the night there might be moonlight, weak but serviceable.

Flat in cover, he peered over an exposed root at the open space, seeing little. From the tribe house drifted thin smoke and faint smells of cooking; the women were making the last meal of the day. Three of the old men squatted outside, wordless, motionless except for occasional slow scratchings of heads or buttocks. Several small dogs sat along the walls, hungrily sniffing the odors of food, wistfully eyeing the house, yet not daring to whine and thus disturb the meditations of their merciless masters. From a couple of closed outhouses sounded occasional gruntings of pigs and querulous notes of hens. From the surrounding jungle came the scattered noises of wilder beasts and birds saying their odd farewell to the dying day. Otherwise nothing disturbed the deceptive peace of this murderers' lair.

Narrowly watching, Driscoll grinned. His luck still held good. Somehow he had forgotten the dogs, which, if he had arrived earlier, might have smelled him and betrayed him. Now, with their nostrils full of food odors, they could not perceive any alien scent in the air. As for the old men—

Just then one of those old men

looked straight at him. And, although the old face remained expressionless and the lanky body below it did not move, something seemed to tighten.

For no conscious reason, the white man turned his face downward and shut his eyes. And for unmeasured minutes thereafter he stayed purposely blind, all senses concentrated in his ears. From the medley of natural noises he picked no sinister steps; and presently some inner adviser told him to lift his head and look again.

The oldster now sat as before, head drooping, attitude indifferent. But, after one keen glance at him and the others, the lurking outlander switched his gaze elsewhere. He remembered the time when all the home guards had come forth to catch him because some old man had felt a warning signal. And, without deliberate thought, he realized that these jungle people caught impressions from sources invisible, inaudible, but not imperceptible. They *felt* things; especially the telepathic threat of hostile eyes.

And he himself, after six solitary days in the hut of a Jivero dreamer, had acquired enough of the same perception to sense the retaliating menace and cut off the mysterious current flowing from his brain to that of the jungle habitant. This somber forest was a queer place; a realm of queer influences, which these surviving veterans of many a sanguinary expedition had learned to catch and meditatively interpret.

Uneasily he looked around him, wishing he knew where the other oldsters were, and half expecting to detect one or more of them stealing at him with lifted lance. But he saw none. They must be in the tribe house. His gaze went to the hut of the blind man, and rested there. Whether its door was yet locked he could not discern; it was beyond his angle of view, hidden by the curving wall. He found himself wondering whether the Jiveros had noticed anything suspicious about that bush lock the morning after he retied it, and wishing for one more look at the captive before going his own way. Oddly, the wish was granted.

Out from that hut walked Scar Face. And deliberately he walked straight toward the hidden spy.

He was muffled now in Jivero clothes: a skirt-like length of cloth from waist to calves, another wrapped around shoulders and torso. Above those dull wrappings his hairless skull and eyeless visage looked deathly; and his slow, solemn gait made him seem truly a moving corpse.

As he came nearer, Driscoll felt chilly. The steady approach of that funereal figure was awesome. Moreover, it was potentially dangerous; the old men yonder were squatting straighter and watching sharply, perhaps again sensing some lurking presence behind that tree.

Hardly a dozen feet away, the dread figure of the blind man paused, facing straight toward Driscoll. Then he turned aside, resumed his gradual steps, moved along the forest edge for several rods.

At length he paused again.

Slowly he spread his arms, widening the loose body cloth until it hung on either side like wings of a great bat; then moved those arms up and down, opening and shutting those dull folds. Turning back, he retraced his solemn course.

With measured tread he went past the tree, to stop once more at a distance and repeat his simulation of a vampire, a ghost, or whatever other infernal thing seemed to obsess him. His wings now flapped more rapidly, and his gashed visage was turned up to the dying sun.

"*Manyáhei!*" he suddenly yelled in a high pitched voice.

The abrupt shout made every hearer jump. The three old men, now tense, started up. The dogs jerked away from the wall and stood bristling. The ambushed white man darted a hand to his revolver butt.

THAT aboriginal word voiced by Scar Face meant nothing to Driscoll. To the intent warriors it was not only intelligible, but part of a traditional Jivero war chant, and now exceedingly significant. Rigidly they awaited more.

The wings sank. The blind, mad, demoniacal man once more walked toward the tree and, without pause, on past it. His gait now was mechanically stiff. His head remained tipped back. His mouth gave forth noises which, though rhythmic, were incomprehensible to the old Jiveros.

"Fee—fi—fo—fum!
I smell the blood of an Am-eri-cun!
And be he 'live or be he dead,
He must lie low or lose his head!"

Driscoll stared. As the variation of an ancient rhyme sank into his brain and the rigid shape receded, his grip on his gun loosened.

Marching onward, the stiff legged creature reached a certain point, turned jerkily toward his left; stalked toward the big house; halted near the gaping Indians. The wings again swayed up and down, lifeless as if twitched by alternating springs. Then there racketed metallic words in orthodox formula:

"Manyáhei! Manyáhei!
(We have fought! We have fought!)
Mahei! Mahei!
(We have killed! We have killed!)
Tumashi ayambrua makahei!
(We have taken the blood of revenge!)
Muka tsupiktai!
(We cut off the enemies' heads!)
Hukitai! Hukitai!
(We bring them with us!)"

The harsh yells stopped. The swinging wings halted, shoulder high. The living corpse stood frozen. The listening ancients remained motionless, wordless, breathless. So did everything else. Not a dog moved, not a pig grunted, not a hen clucked; not even the jungle gave forth a sound, near or far. Upon all that small world brooded intense silence.

Then, still stiff, Scar Face fell forward like a log. The impact of his face on the hard ground was clearly audible. He lay without a quiver. The old men looked at him and at one another. And with sudden speed they picked him up and carried him into the big house.

Immediately afterward arose a clamor of voices, full of excitement and gladness. It continued, gradually diminishing, until long after sundown.

Before full blackness obliterated everything, a man came out, rounded up the dogs, led them somewhere out of sight and reach of nocturnal killers. Otherwise nobody appeared. As swift night swallowed the clearing, Driscoll was free to resume his outward creep. But, for some unanalyzed reason, he did not go. Still prone behind his tree, he waited for something or other, without wondering why. He had twelve hours of night ahead, and he did not feel like starting just yet.

After awhile he felt, rather than heard, bare feet move across the clearing toward the little house of Scar Face. There followed faint mutterings, slight creaks, a grunt or two, and the virtually inaudible return of those feet. And he knew the blind man had, after recovering from his fit, been escorted to his pen and locked up for the night. Soon afterward the savages in the big shelter began their nightly dance.

When it was well under way, he stood up and walked over to the light streaked wall, there to peer in. As before, he saw the smoky fire, the group of little heads, the gyrating women, the phlegmatic old fighters. But now there was a new note in the chorusing voices, a new vigor in the trotting legs. Instead of a dreary ritual of hopeful but fearful petitioning of devils, this was a prance of celebration. The females of the species felt that their males had made their kills and were returning to the lair.

Sensing this, Driscoll also vaguely perceived that the change was caused by the weird acting and—to him—unintelligible howling of the crazed captive; he understood, too, that to these people that performance had been a clairvoy-

ant trance, wherein some powerful jungle spirit had spoken through the twisted mind and mouth of that unfortunate. The fellow certainly was clever—devilishly clever. In fact, too clever. How had he seen, smelled, or felt Driscoll behind that tree? Certainly not by eyes, nose, ears or touch. There was something infernal about that. And why had he voiced that rigmarole to "lie low or lose his head"? Driscoll needed no such caution. And why—

The tall man shrugged his shoulders and gave up useless puzzling. Scar Face was cracked. Crazy like a fox, maybe, but crazy all the same. So was everybody else around here; murder maniacs, or something, all living in a big green bughouse. If he stayed here any longer, he'd be getting cuckoo himself. Maybe he was getting that way already. But to hell with all of it! He was going. And he went.

He went with a resolute swagger, hand on holstered gun, defiant of everything. If those old tough guys inside wanted trouble, let 'em come out and get it! He was on his legs now, and sore at himself for hanging around here so long. And, pitch-black though the night was, he somehow walked straight to the creek path and began following it.

The voices died behind him. The settlement was gone, swallowed up, out of his life forever. As it vanished from sight and sound, his belligerent mood quieted into sober calculation; and he slowed, paused, sank to his knees and hands.

With a reminiscent grin he shoved his gun again into the hollow of his back, where it would ride most easily. Then he went on, once more feeling his way. The firm bareness of the trodden ground against his palms brought another grin. He was outward bound, on his own, sure of himself. And everything back there could be damned.

But soon his purposeful crawl slowed down. Something or other seemed to be tugging at him from behind, at first gently, then more and more strongly, like the gradually tightening strain of a lengthening rubber band. Presently he stopped. For some time he remained there motionless, staring blankly at the blackness. Then he again lifted a hand, moved it forward, pulled it suddenly back. All at once he wheeled about and crawled fast over his back trail.

"Damn it, he's a white man!" he muttered.

And, without another halt, he returned whence he had come; a man inexplicably changed, in this place of mysterious influences, from what he had meant to be. Instead of the coldly hard self which had emerged from solitary confinement in the hut of a devil dreamer, he was once more the impulsive Jeff Driscoll who, diving from a wrecked canoe to save a drowned partner, had let his own paddle float hopelessly out of reach.

CHAPTER V

GETAWAY

"HEY, you!"

Driscoll's growl sounded through the wall. At once came answer from the black interior—

"Ah!"

Quick, short, eager, the single exclamation spoke volumes. Whatever exhaustion the prisoner might have incurred by his recent clairvoyant exhibition was fully compensated by rest; and now he was alert as any trapped creature glimpsing escape.

"Come here," added the voice, a few seconds later, a few feet to the left.

Driscoll, feeling his way along the poles, found the knotted vine at the invisible door.

"Break it! Cut it! Hurry up!" pleaded the captive.

The other turned his head, scanning the tribe house, listening to the unbroken repetition of voices and shaking shells. Then, deliberately opening his clasp knife, he retorted:

"Take it easy. We've got all night."

No answer came. While the blade

worked on the tough liana, the man within held his tongue. Subconsciously the cutter noticed that this bush lock seemed stronger than the one he had unraveled before; thicker, denser, astonishingly resistant to steel. It felt like rubber full of wires, easier to bend than to sever. When its last strand snapped the waiting man breathed sharply. Then the upright logs jerked violently aside in rapid succession. Through the opening plunged a dim white shape which collided headlong with the liberator, nearly knocking him off his legs.

"Sorry," gasped Scar Face, straightening up outside.

For a moment he said no more, but deeply inhaled the air of freedom. In his throat began the rapid, hysterical chuckle which he had voiced on Driscoll's first arrival, a week ago. But he stopped it short. Reaching, he found the tall man's arms and gripped them as if steadying himself. Driscoll, after an involuntary movement to throw off the clutch, stood quiet.

With another full breath, slower and steadier, the short fellow relaxed, hands dropping.

"Good!" he said. "You've played fair. There've been times when I feared— But never mind. Let's go!"

"All right. But you'll have to crawl, fellow. I can't see the path."

"Crawl? Ha-ha!" Scar Face laughed shortly. "Not much! Come, let's— But wait! Come inside a minute."

"What for?"

"Food. We must eat sometimes."

"Food? Hell, we can't carry—"

"Come in here, I said!"

So sharp was the impatient interruption that Driscoll threw another look at the tribe house.

"Pipe down!" he growled. "Or I'll sure walk out on you."

"You'd better not."

"No? Why not?"

Once more Scar Face chuckled—this time with a hard, sinister note. Without other reply he stepped back. Driscoll vaguely saw him stoop and reenter his doorway. Scowling, he hesitated, then bent low and followed. That bleak, unexplained derision hinted at baleful possibilities.

"Well, I'm here," he announced, arising inside and facing the blind man. "Now explain yourself."

"Put these outside first."

Into his arms came a bulky bunch of bananas. With a muttered oath Driscoll dropped it.

"I'm no jackass, if you are," he refused. "Think I'm going to tote these all night?"

A grunt of mingled anger and disgust replied. Then, wearily, Scar Face began to explain:

"Oh, listen, if you must waste time. We're not going by land. We travel by water. That's the only possible way out now. That path you came in on has some new traps—built low. Nothing more than a foot high can pass them. And no man on hands and knees travels as low as that. I don't know just where they are. So we can't chance it—and we don't have to, anyway. It's lucky for you that you didn't try to sneak out on me. You'd have been a corpse before you got far."

Driscoll chilled. For a second he saw himself again on that path, recklessly confident, ruthlessly deserting this victim, heading straight into—

"Whew!" he breathed. Then, "How come?"

"I don't quite know. They got suspicious, somehow. Maybe it was something about the trap you sprung, or about my door lock, or—well, something or other. They're suspicious of everything, always. There wasn't anything definite enough to start them hunting for you, but they decided to make extra traps on that trail, low enough to hit anything taller than a small and harmless animal.

"Usually they don't want to kill any animals that way; certain animals are sacred, especially tapirs; but now, until the fighters get home, they're taking no chances."

DRISCOLL was silent a moment, realizing that this was what had underlain the childish rhyme that afternoon, warning him to lie low. He remembered that the reciter had not said "creep" or "crawl" or "bend" low, but "lie" low; meaning to stay hereabouts, not to attempt passage of that riverward trail. Deeply veiled though that warning had been, it was enough to put a faithful partner on guard against everything in general—and all that an unfaithful one deserved. If he should sneak out alone after that, his trap would be sprung by his own disloyalty.

"Uh-huh," he said, recovering. "Well, I'm still with you. And say, how did you know I was behind that tree?"

"Oh, it was time for you to be coming back. And I felt you. A man gets that way when he's blind. He has to feel things he can't see or hear. And in this place it's more so. There's something in the air—but never mind that. I was afraid some of these old devils might feel you too. So I gave them something else to think about. And while they're still thinking—" his words quickened again—"we must be moving!"

"How?"

"By water, I told you. Meaning by canoe, of course. Didn't think I meant swimming, did you? Get out, now—and take that fruit with you."

Voice again choleric, he motioned toward the bananas, then turned back into the darkness to get something else. Driscoll's distended pupils discerned the movements, and his mind, willing enough now, accepted the command. Stooping, he grasped the thick stem. As he did so he glanced again toward the tribe house—and grew rigid.

Against the thin streaks of dull light leaking through that long wall he saw something move. Moving shadows were plentiful within the domicile; but this thing seemed solid, and outside. Moreover, it was growing larger, coming nearer. A moment of tight peering convinced him that it was real—and double.

Two men, silent as ghosts, were walking toward the captive's quarters.

"The devil!" he muttered. "Watch yourself, buddy! We're caught!"

A startled hiss sounded from Scar Face. Driscoll bent and stepped out.

The black phantoms halted. Whether they had heard his exclamation, whether they could see him in the density, or whether, with their devilish perceptions, they merely felt his hostile nearness, he could not tell. Nor could he judge what had prompted them to come forth, or whether others were at his right and left.

For long, dragging seconds he and they stood motionless, soundless, while the incessant ululations of the women shrilled on. His right hand hovered, undecided, between his holster and the pocket in which was his long bladed knife. Then came action.

At the doorway behind him sounded a stumble, a grunt, a dull fall. Scar Face, sneaking out, had tripped over the forgotten banana bunch and pitched headlong.

From the black forms came snaky hisses. They shortened, crouching, and moved ahead. Instinct rather than sight warned Driscoll to beware stabs of long lances. Swiftly sidestepping, he drew and fired.

The flash and crash of his gun seemed blinding, deafening, in the darkness and the sudden cessation of voices. At the first shot the female chorus stopped short. Dazzled, half seeing, the gunman discerned the fall of both the savages, faintly heard the thuds of dropping spears.

Twice more he shot, now at random, seeking other stealthy assailants. He found none. Still peering tensely ahead and aside, he snapped—

"Are you O. K, buddy?"

In answer, Scar Face loosed a series of shrieks: a rapid racket of differing tones, all appalling, so fast and varied as to seem voices of a dozen men. Driscoll whirled toward him, gun up, demanding—

"What's got you?"

"Nothing. Yell like hell! *Yi-yi-yee-yow-yow!*"

Again the frightful clamor yammered from the captive. Driscoll, catching the idea, bellowed horribly in bass. Too, he fired again, this time at the tribe house.

From within it now burst a bedlam of answering yells and screams. The faint firelight abruptly dimmed and expired.

"Now!" panted Scar Face. His questing hands grasped Driscoll's left arm and tugged toward the creek. "Follow me!"

They went at a lope. Sure footed as a normal man in daylight, the eyeless fugitive drew his rescuer along without faltering. Vision useless, the gunman traveled in momentary expectation of headlong collision. Yet, though the blind now literally led the blind, neither fell.

Turning into thicker going, where Driscoll followed in file, they trod an unseen path for a few minutes, then halted. Scar Face released his hold.

"Here it is! Get in!" he prompted.

Groping, fumbling, Driscoll found the blunt end of a log canoe in a clump of brush; felt his way aboard.

"Paddles?"

"Coming," responded the other, several feet away.

The brush rustled, then broad paddles came sliding into the shell. Then the dugout lurched and slid outward, staggered as Scar Face came swarming over the stern, drifted free.

"Quiet, now!" muttered the blind man. "Sit tight while I work her past."

Driscoll sensibly obeyed. Motionless, useless, he squatted while the clumsy craft floated like a feather down the inky waterway. Occasionally he heard dips of a paddle behind him, hardly more audible than a falling leaf. Otherwise there was no sound but the diminishing discord at the tribe house, where savages, shocked into defensive uproar by the surprise attack of enemies with guns, wondered why their foes now hesitated.

Soon the uproar died away. Quietly Driscoll reloaded his gun and holstered it. With an occasional soft bump against the shore or faint rub against watery bush, the boat glided on. For a moment before picking up his own paddle Driscoll stared somberly toward the treacherous path, only a few feet away in the blackness, along which he had started a little earlier. If he had not turned back . . . Again he shuddered.

CHAPTER VI

FOLLOWED

THROUGHOUT the night the canoe voyaged onward with never a halt. For some hours it was a blind thing feeling its way, repeatedly bumping other things, of which a few seemed to be alive; for they made sudden splashes in the water and were gone at once. At length came moonlight, feeble but helpful, restoring vision to Driscoll and thus increasing speed and sureness of motion. The creek still was dim and seemingly endless; but at least it was visible for a few yards ahead and, paddling in the bow, he conned the course with unerring judgment. Scar Face, behind, wielded his blade with quick response to all spoken directions.

Behind them sounded no pursuit. Until daylight there could be none, Scar Face said. The few Jivero home guards, although vastly puzzled by the sudden cessation of the supposed surprise attack and the continuous silence thereafter, would not open their door before morning; they would believe that enemies lurked just outside. The crucial moments of immediate danger had been at first, when the war-like instincts of the old men within the house would have prompted them to rush forth, even against bullets, if not checked by the hullabaloo of seemingly numerous voices outside.

Although that weird multiplication of yells was an old Jivero trick, which those old-timers themselves had used

many times, they could not be sure that it was a trick until they could see. So they would remain within walls, fulfilling their duty as protective garrison while night lasted.

Even after day should bring them reassurance, they could not follow by water, because Scar Face had stolen their only canoe. All other dugouts, he said, had been taken by the departing warriors. This one, old and cracked, had been left for general use: hunting and fishing along the creek by the old men, travel to a back plantation by the women and so on. Since it was any one's boat, its paddles had been stowed in a convenient hollow tree. Scar Face himself had, at various times, been compelled to help at paddling this craft and had memorized the location of both canoe and paddles. Hence his sureness in managing the quick escape.

But there was nothing to prevent the men from following their escaped captive by land after sunrise. They knew just where every trap was set on the creek path, and could detour all such dangers with little effort. Moreover, the path ran almost directly riverward, crossing and recrossing the waterway, which meandered tortuously. Once started on that trail, the enraged oldsters would run like bloodhounds.

Furthermore, the gang of younger warriors was likely to return now at any moment. The six days of recuperation given Driscoll in the devil dreamer's hut had been the extreme limit of safety. That was the reason why Scar Face, on the tall man's return, had been in such haste to start at once.

Driscoll, listening to all this, restrained himself from snarling:

"Why didn't you spit all this out when I came back? Then we'd have moved out right away. You and your damned bananas held up the game, and now—"

But he knew that he himself, with his questions and refusal to carry those bananas, had caused the delay; knew, too, that this was no time to snarl at the poor devil who twice had saved him, and that every minute must be used in getting out of this gloomy maze. So he stroked all the faster, mouth shut, eyes strained ahead.

Daylight came, ghastly as a dead man's blanched face, but rapidly growing more heartening. Noises, at first scattered, then quickening, swelled into a pounding chorus: the polyglot medley of beasts and birds greeting new day. From the blind man astern came the sharp question—

"Are we out?"

"No," said Driscoll. "How much farther is it?"

"How should I know?" snapped the other.

Driscoll scowled, smiled crookedly, threw more weight on his paddle. In the long hours behind them he had come to rely on the feelings of his queer partner. But that partner, who had learned every inch of his prison, now was so far from his usual environment that he had lost all sense of direction and distance. Henceforth the fate of both rested in the eyes, brain, and hands of the bow paddler.

The animal clamor subsided. The sun swung steadily higher, spattering its intercepted brilliance at random through the myriad crevices of foliage. Time passed unmeasured by the set minds in the canoe. Driscoll now stroked at full speed, halting only momentarily when some sudden rustle of verdure caught his attention, swinging on again when no attack developed. At length the boat broke from the thick cover into the dazzling radiance of a wide river.

"Whoopee!" Driscoll jubilated. "We're clear!"

A quick breath behind him echoed his thanksgiving. But, after a silent moment of rest, the stern paddler shoved hard.

"Hit it up!" he urged. "Straight out!"

Driscoll jerked his head around, looked, listened, detected nothing. So incisive was the command, however, that he obeyed without question. With

long, powerful strokes he heaved the old shell headlong toward midstream.

Suddenly something skipped alongside, striking water with a vicious splash. It was an arrow.

Other arrows followed in quick patter, beside, beyond, behind them. Long yellow shafts whispered, plunged, floated useless. Two struck the canoe itself. From shore there arose a medley of furious yells.

Then, all at once, the sleet of hissing death stopped. The dugout had slid out of range.

With a grunt of relief Driscoll let his paddle drag. Scar Face did likewise. Drifting, the bearded man scowled vengefully at the jungle—and saw no human shape. The vindictive old devils, baffled, had taken cover behind trees, fearing gunfire. Their raging howls continued, diminished, ceased. The two fugitives floated free on a broad, wet highway.

"Well, that's that," commented Driscoll, wiping his forehead. "And it sure was a hot finish. How'd you know they were there, partner?"

"They weren't there. I heard them running. My ears must be keener than yours."

"Guess so. I didn't hear a thing," admitted the other.

Carefully, Driscoll surveyed the river, up and down, sighting no other canoe, no sign of human life along the banks. The headhunting raiders who had gone forth by water, and whom both whites had dreaded to meet returning, still were somewhere in the distances of the vast forest. So, turning the bow downstream, he resumed paddling.

The paddle behind him, catching the measured beat, swung with responsive regularity. Weary, hungry, hatless under the fierce sun, destitute of everything but a cracked old dugout and one firearm, the strangely mated comrades nevertheless drove ahead with unflagging strength. Whatever dangers might lurk on either side, whatever menace might await them ahead, they were out of the clutch of the jungle and all its deadly traps. That was enough.

CHAPTER VII

MID-RIVER

SUNDOWN. A small sandy island in midriver. On it, two queer human beings at a tiny fire. At its edge, a battered old log canoe. Upstream, downstream, empty water.

On the heads of the two men rested crude hats of wilted leaves, braided hours ago into thick sun helmets. On the sand lay other leaves, which had formed a grotesque garment protecting the spine of the blind man. On the fire, roasted sections of a peccary shot earlier in the day by Driscoll. As each piece reached the edible stage of cooking, the tall man pulled it forth, cut it in half, passed a portion to his partner, placed a new slab of flesh on the fire.

At length, with long drinks from the river, both ended their meal. Driscoll again looked all along the river and up into the sky, then vouchsafed:

"Nothing in sight. Not even rain. If we only had something to smoke, this would be the end of a perfect day."

"It's perfect to me." The other yawned. "All I need is sleep."

"I can use some of that myself." Driscoll's face lengthened in an echoing yawn. "But—uh—let's see. There was something I wanted to say."

He frowned at the sand, mind sluggish from fatigue and the long hours of hunger.

"Can't it wait?" asked the blind man.

"I guess so."

With which both stretched out and forgot everything. Neither had slept for two days and a night. Now, as daylight vanished, nature asserted herself.

Dank chill, animal noises, new light woke them. Again Driscoll surveyed the surroundings, saw no danger. He kindled a fire with rubber wrapped matches which he had preserved through all vicissitudes, and cooked the meat

still remaining—cooked it hard this time, because, after a night of humidity, it was rank. The pair ate, drank, and were reinvigorated. Then said Driscoll:

"I remember now what I wanted to say. Who are you? I told you who I was, a long time ago. And how'd you get here? I told you how I did. It's about time you came across."

The blind face across the dying fire twitched slightly. A dry voice countered:

"Well, go on. What else do you want to know?"

"Huh? Why, nothing much. And if you don't want to tell that much, let it slide. Only it's sort of unhandy not to know a fellow's name. And if you know something that'll help us out of here, I'd better know it too. We're a hell of a long way from home, fellow, and not too well heeled. And I've got the only eyes in this outfit. What I hear may help me see right."

A pause. Then, quietly—

"You don't remember my promise?"

"What promise?"

"That if you came back to me, I might show you something worth your while?"

"Oh—" Driscoll chuckled tolerantly. "Sure, I remember you said that. But I understand, buddy. You wanted to get out, and I was your only bet. Promises don't mean anything when a fellow's in a hole."

"No? Then why did you keep your own promise and come back to me?"

Driscoll rubbed a big hand across his hairy jaw.

"I don't know," he grudgingly admitted. "Fact is, I started off without you. I got on that creek path and crawled some distance. But I couldn't go through with it. I didn't get scared, or anything, but—I just had to turn around and make good with you. I don't know why. It wasn't sensible."

The scarred face twisted in a queer laugh.

"All right, Driscoll. You're both right and wrong. It wasn't sensible. But it wasn't me that you had to make good with. You had to make good with yourself! You're built that way. I knew that the first night you came—though I'll admit I had my doubts afterward, while I waited and worried. But you came through clean, and if you're wondering why, that's the reason.

"So much for you. Now about me: I'd come clean too, right now, if I were sure of myself. But I'm not. I've played crazy so long that now maybe I really am that way. Until I'm sure that I'm not, I'm nobody. I'm a dead man, and my name doesn't matter. Call me anything you like—buddy or partner or whatever comes handy. It all sounds good to me.

"What does matter is this: Somewhere below here, a day or two down, there ought to be a big sugarloaf rock with a huge *aceite palo* tree behind it—on the right bank, at a sharp turn. And just around that turn there ought to be a sandy beach. If you see those things, stop there. If you don't—"

He stopped, shrugged, got up. He stood a moment as if sensing direction, then walked toward the canoe; found it and crept aboard. Mouth tight, he squatted, waiting.

DRISCOLL, still on shore, opened his lips for further questions; slowly closed them, arose, and boarded the craft in turn. On the hairless head of the blind man he set the drooping leaf helmet, and on the bare back he draped the protective shield of verdure, now rather faded but still useful. On his bushy hair he shoved down his own makeshift sunshade. With a steady shove on his paddle he pushed the dugout off the grinding sands. As it drifted free he sank and swung into a methodical long distance stroke. And for many hours thereafter no words passed except laconic steering directions by the pilot.

Whatever queries or conjectures arose in the mind of the bowman remained

unuttered. It was plain enough that they would not be answered if asked; that the nameless "dead man" had revealed all he chose to disclose for the time and would say no more until his mood changed. It was equally clear that he could give no further instructions, even if he would; he could not see the almost changeless shore lines, could not gage the present rate of the current; could not, therefore, judge where he was or what was his distance from some other point imperfectly remembered—or, perhaps, a point entirely imaginary.

As he himself had conceded, he was not sure even of his own sanity. He might be sane, with occasional lapses into madness; or, contrariwise, deranged, with brief flashes of lucidity. In either case Driscoll was, as before, the eyes of the boat. And, as before, he concentrated continuously on his vital duty.

Throughout that long day he saw no sign of human friend or foe. Near noon, as hunger grew keen, he swung the boat to the right bank; coasted stealthily along it, spied an unwary monkey on a low bough and shot him off. When the tough meat was broiled and eaten, they resumed the monotonous long swing of the blades. And all that afternoon they toiled like mechanical figures actuated by clockwork, keeping the canoe well out toward midstream to utilize the full power of the strong current, yet well within sight of that western bank whereon might stand a sugarloaf rock.

Sundown approached. Driscoll now scanned both banks and mid-river, seeking a haven for the night. No islands lay in sight; nor were any open sands along the edges of the jungle walls. After a time the searching eyes fixed on something at the end of the visible reach of water ahead. As the next turn drew near, he grunted shortly. The steersman deflected the craft westward. Close to shore, Driscoll grunted again, with a different note. He was looking at a bold, cone shaped rock backed by a great yellow oilwood tree.

"You're not so crazy, fellow," Driscoll declared. "Here's your sugar rock and your greasy tree. Also your sharp point."

"Ah!" The other's voice was jubilant. "Good! Get around it!"

Paddles dipped again. Close to the rock, the canoe floated around the watery curve. Beyond, the bowman glimpsed an arc of open sand. Then something drew his gaze quickly down the new vista of water. Instantly he bore back on his paddle.

"Hell's bells!" he exclaimed.

The river, which had been blank so long, was empty no longer. Hardly a quarter mile away, forging upstream, heading for that sandy beach, came a snaky line of canoes loaded with savages.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RAIDERS

BACKPADDLING with desperate speed, the white men worked their canoe back behind the rock. There, after a rapid exchange of words, they swung the sluggish shell around and drove it several rods farther up along the bank. Helped by Driscoll, Scar Face scrambled ashore and squatted in thick brush. Then Driscoll quickly sunk the dugout.

Down the waterworn bank hung many bared tree roots, and along it lay bleached trunks and branches of other trees undercut and drowned. To wedge the dull shell among these and force it under the surface was short work and no sacrifice. It could be extricated whenever wanted; and meanwhile it was hidden from human sight. The paddles, slid into a dense tangle of verdure, also were completely concealed.

Then the two men themselves faded away into the pathless forest. First, however, Driscoll sneaked across the intervening point and looked again at the oncoming killers. The canoes numbered seven, and each seemed to hold about ten men. The paddle strokes betrayed

fatigue; and, although the bowmen of the foremost boats eyed their landing place with habitual wariness, they showed no sign of having detected the alien dugout which, floating around the stone, had withdrawn so quickly behind it. That unlooked for canoe had been in the deep shadow of sunset, and their vision had been dulled by labor and sun glare.

With that conclusion, Driscoll returned to his eyeless companion, to take his hand and lead him back into the jungle. They did not go far; just far enough to find a thicket where they could hide. There they rested motionless, listening.

Soon they heard faint footsteps approaching, passing, roving about; the stealthy reconnaissance of scouts seeking any ambushed assailants. Driscoll grinned tightly. He knew that his own bare feet and those of Scar Face could have left no prints on the hard soil hereabouts, that during their run they had broken no branches of brush, and that the search of the tired paddlers was somewhat perfunctory. Eager to eat and rest, on guard only against formidable numbers of lurking enemies, they would hardly pry into every bush of a trackless forest. And so it proved.

The movements back toward the river were careless; bushes rustled loudly, voices spoke, and all sounds manifested reassurance. Presently the hidden pair were again alone. Around them hung silence; silence and brief twilight, swiftly thickening into black night.

"They've gone back to the beach," whispered Driscoll.

"So I heard," dryly returned the other. "How many are there?"

"All together? About seventy."

The scarred brow wrinkled speculatively.

"Any women?"

"Women? No, I didn't see any. Why would there be women?"

"Captives. The raid wasn't a complete success, evidently. There should be about ninety men, and a bunch of young women—new wives, you know. Twenty men lost, no girls— No, they didn't do so well. Got a few heads, maybe, but—" He paused, chuckled softly, added, "I'm glad I'm not playing prophet any longer. Yesterday I predicted a great victory. Prophets who miss fire have a thin time around here."

With that he became silent, his face lowering into grim lines.

"Well, what now?" asked Driscoll.

"Now? Nothing. We'll have to sleep here. They'll go on in the morning. Then we can crawl out."

Driscoll frowned and regarded a vaguely visible bush stem, thinking. Aside from the discomforts of empty stomachs and a rough bed, a night in their present covert was no hardship. As Scar Face predicted, the homeward bound raiders would undoubtedly depart early the next day. The only sensible course was to lie quiet. Yet—

"We could use a better canoe," suggested Driscoll. "That thing we've got is so rotten it's likely to fall apart any minute. And we're going to need considerable grub between here and the Amazon. These bozos have what we want."

"True enough. But how do you think we'd get those things?"

"I don't know. I was just thinking."

An almost inaudible laugh sounded—a laugh of derision.

"Think again!" came a whisper. "Seventy men out there, and how many shots in our locker?"

Driscoll's fingers felt along his belt.

"Thirteen. And six in the gun makes nineteen."

"Unlucky numbers. Forget it!"

TO BE CONCLUDED

The Story of an Ill-Fated Treasure

The MAN from the SEA

By R. V. GERY

FOR fifteen years now Dominick Scanlan has been parish priest of Mara in the Province of Connaught in Western Ireland. He is a magnificent specimen of his class, this father, with the bull neck and shoulders, the blue chin and the choleric yet tolerant eye that sees much but flares into indignation rarely; a sane, sound, eupeptic gentleman, able at will to dispute with Maynooth on the Fathers or haul on a net among the fisherfolk of his rocky, rain swept domain.

In his younger days in Mara he was known and widely feared for a certain practical abruptness in his dealings. Men said, looking over their shoulders for a glimpse of the stalwart form, that Father Scanlan stood for no blather, and would be apt to pitch any of his parishioners to the "siventeen divils" who'd come to him with any tales that did not stand up under the searchlight of pure reason—and pure reason is a quality that now and then is at a discount in Connaught. The place is still full of "Them People". Banshee, leprechaun, pishogue, little green men and other

manifestations are yet common property among the peasants, and you are at liberty to hang "superstition" on the place if you will. Many do. Father Scanlan did once.

Until, as a sequel to a peculiar chain of events, he solemnly burned a diary he kept, cast certain objects far into the sea, had a six-hour interview behind closed doors with that exceedingly wise personage, his bishop, and—on the prelate's most sound advice—took a six months' retreat in a monastery before returning to his fold. You could never call Father Scanlan chastened. He is not the chastenable kind. But from that time, ten years or more ago, there is one subject on which his lips are locked, and that is the occult. Also, he has dropped a study that was once his relaxation and his delight—he no longer delves deep into the literature of Philip's great Armada, and the history of its vessels, wrecked and shattered on this coast.

During the events which compose this narrative, Father Scanlan kept what he used to term his journal. After the crisis he burned it with much thoroughness in a wood behind his house, but to piece out the tale, and afford glimpses into the good father's mind, there follow extracts from that lost manuscript, scrappy, incoherent, maybe, but reflecting a great and growing amazement and its invasion of a mind not in the least given to amaze.

Mara Strand is in Connaught, then, a two-mile stretch of beach looking out into the misty Atlantic, and with no land between it and America. Tall cliffs of black basalt tower sheer from the sand; processions of cruel rocks, fragments of the cliff itself, march out into the sea. In a calm, Mara is a beauty spot, even on that wild and lonely coast; but when the gales begin to blow from the salt wildernesses outside, then it swiftly changes into a raging inferno, lashed and hammered thunderously by the rollers, blind with sheet upon sheet of driving rain.

At its southern end the rocks, through some geological freak, run out for nearly a mile into the ocean, in a kind of horn of weedy shelves, covered at high water, but at the ebb black and glistening with their slippery kelp. The horn is known yet as Spaniard's Grave, for there is one of Philip's galleons sunk off the tip of it. There are several such up and down the west coast of Ireland, and some horrid legends yet remain of what happened to their ship's companies at the hands of the wild kern wreckers of 1588. At any rate, Mara still reckons the wicked ledges a queer old place, and the kelp burners steadily refuse to frequent it after dark.

A MAN sat on a rock within fifty yards of the horn's end. At first glance you would have said that he was engaged in staring attentively down into the green swirling waters beneath him, interested maybe in the sand logged bones of the ancient vessel that tradition said was lying almost within touch there. A second look, however, would have told you that he was blind. His queer blue eyes and mop of orange hair—the latter characteristic of Mara and itself traditionally a relic of the same Spaniards—made him an odd, ethereal figure against the black rocks and the sea. Across his knees he held a lemon colored old fiddle, and he was twitching out a weird melody of halftones as he sat.

Patrick Quin, a tall, sanguine young man with a scrap of black whisker, stood at his side, acting as his eyes. He was watching a broad beamed coasting steamer edging her way in cautiously toward the crags, sounding as she went. Shemus, the fiddler, cocked his head on one side, listening with the blind man's razor-hearing to the splash of the lead and the call of the man in her chains, the thump of her engines, even the breaking ripples at her bow.

"D'ye see him?" he suddenly asked Quin in a high, unearthly voice.

"I do," Quin answered. "The big

English blagyard! On the bridge he is this minute, and ye'd tell him by the fat belly of him from here. And it's what I wish," he went on angrily, "that the divil might sup him up, the same as ye'd sup a pint of porter! The damn interferin' slob! There's divers he's got, no less—ye can see their clothes hangin' out, the Lord save us, the like of big ugly great toads, with windows where their faces would be. And there's some shape of a barge, like, he's in tow, with buckets and all manner of conthraptions —dredge they're afther callin' it, I believe. And dynamite, too, the dirty schemer. And for what all, Shemus? Isn't it for to raise the ould vessel that's been lyin' there so quiet and peaceful these hundhreds of years, and the dead men all about her like herrings? Ach!"

He spat furiously into the heaving sea at his feet.

"What name has he on him at all, Patrick?" Shemus asked. "Did ye hear?"

"Blagdon's the word he goes by," said Quin. "I seen him within in the hotel in Kyleranny, drinkin' brandy and sody with his overseer. A big, red faced fella, and a tongue on him like ye'd get a reelin' in yer head to hear. And he's talkin' all the time of gold—gold an' jewels and pearls them Spanishers wore in the ould ancient times. There's lashin's of it here, undher the sea, he does be sayin'."

Shemus interrupted his fiddling to speak dreamily.

"Goold!" he said. "Goold! It's there, Patrick—it's there! Didn't me grandda have it from his grandda and his grandda from his grandda again? Goold there is, and silver, and plate and the holy pictures—guns and swoords and mighty flagons of wine. And there's the vessel's captain, sittin' in his bare bones beneath us, drinkin' the sweet wine from a cup the like of a flower, and his priests and officers by his side. And there's ladies with the black hair and ladies with the goolden, atin' jellies and cream off platters of the pure red goold. And then there's the mariners . . . "

He drifted off into a rambling utterance, incoherent, a jumble of the three-hundred-year-old legends of that great galleon at rest beneath the restless waves. Quin caught his mood.

"True for you," he said. "There's wonder and miracles down yonder. She's lyin' there, the gallant vessel, with the eel and the conger swimmin' through her windows. And there's no gomeral of an Englishman that's to be raisin' her at the latter end."

Shemus drew his bow across the strings.

"There is not," he said in his curious flat voice. "Leave him strive, the poor ignorant man—there's that'll come to him that'll stop his strivin'."

Once again his speech died away in the queer jumbled murmur, and Patrick Quin shivered; for Shemus the fiddler, the frail wraith of a man, notoriously saw things in his darkness that were denied to others.

He laid a hand on the blind man's shoulder.

"Let you come with me," he said. "For the tide's risin' in it, and there's gloom fallin' beside. It's no place for the two of us."

Shemus rose, and together they set off across the rocks to the beach, already growing dim in the evening. Behind them the steamer dropped anchor, and her riding lights began to glow through the dusk.

AT the base, so to speak, of Spaniard's Grave, crouched in a nook of the cliffs with the typical inconsequence of Irish hostelries, is the long, single storied, whitewashed building known to the thirsty as O'Rourke's. What commercial genius set it down at the dead end of a six-mile stretch of exposed shore road is beyond the scope of this tale; but there it stands, dispensing porter and peaty whisky to a clientele of kelp burners, fishermen and the smallest of small farmers—lonely, forgotten al-

most by outsiders, save for the liquor traveler once a month, and now and again a tourist very far astray.

Patrick Quin and Shemus sat over the fire on that evening in glimmering September, drinking with O'Rourke the proprietor, a nervous, rabbit faced Dubliner of fifty. Outside, it was perfectly still, with the tremendous stillness of western Ireland. Not a breath moved; the winds were laid. The splendid moon lighted up the wild coast like day, the looming basalt crags, the ocean levels, placid and unruffled like a plate of quicksilver. It was getting on for ten o'clock.

Shemus was staring moodily as usual at the fire, while Quin talked in whispers with O'Rourke. The innkeeper's pasty features were anxious.

"Sure, and for why wouldn't he have the right to be dredgin' up the ould vessel?" he was saying of Blagdon. "He'll have leave, there's no doubt, from them that has the say in it—and indeed, if there's gold down there like they're after sayin', he'd be the finished fool to shtop his divarsions because a parcel of gossoon's the like of Shemus and yerself here'd be tellin' him. Wouldn't he, now?"

There was the practical certainty that the innkeeper's charity toward Blagdon and his operations was colored brightly with self-interest, for he stood to make a steady daily income from the crew and divers. Quin laughed bitterly.

"Faith," he said, "it's easy enough seen ye're a Dubliner, O'Rourke. It's only them that'd talk so of the ould ancient things, that's better left alone as they are. It's no good thing to be meddlin' with them, I'm tellin' ye now."

O'Rourke came as near as he could to looking contemptuous.

"*Arrah,* what kind of chat is this ye have, Patrick?" he asked. "Flat superstition it is, to be sure, and there's Father Scanlan that'll be drawin' down a mighty great penance on ye, if he hears ye speakin' so. There's no reason in it. Ye should be knowin' better."

Shemus turned his blank face toward them and spoke suddenly.

"Ye're a fool, O'Rourke," he said sourly. "And ignorant as well. There's desthruction comin' to that man yonder."

Silence fell in the firelit room. O'Rourke stared at Shemus, crossing himself mechanically. Like many disbelievers, he was a coward when it came to the point.

"What's that ye say, Shemus?" he asked under his breath.

"It's told me," said the blind man dreamily, and without deeming it necessary to explain the identity of his informer. "It's told me that there's death and hell waitin' for them that'd be tamperin' with what's yonder below the sea. Out of the sea it'll come, too."

He plucked at the strings of his fiddle, a strange *pizzicato* attuned to the flickering firelight and the hour. O'Rourke breathed heavily through his nose. Even a Dubliner did not laugh much at Shemus of the sight.

Then, shatteringly loud in the quiet, there was a single blow at the door. The innkeeper jumped as if he had been shot and emitted a squeal like a trapped rabbit. Shemus swung about in his seat, blind eyes on the doorway.

"What's this?" Quin gasped.

No one answered, and for a long minute the men sat tense. Then the blow was repeated, authoritatively, and a heavy English voice was heard demanding admission.

Shemus cackled sardonically at the sound, and O'Rourke bustled across to the door. He admitted Blagdon, a broad shouldered, beefy faced man in loud tweeds and a deerstalker cap.

"Good evenin' to yer Honor's self!" O'Rourke rubbed his hands obsequiously. "And what can we be doin' for you?"

The Englishman looked about him curiously and with a good deal of contempt.

"You're a funny lot," he said. "Keep-

ing a man waiting half an hour on your doorstep this time of night. Give me a drink, first—best whisky you've got."

He plumped himself down in a chair at the table. O'Rourke hastened to serve him, while Shemus, an odd smile lighting up his pale face, twitched a new strain from his fiddle.

Blagdon looked about him once more at the squalid taproom, flickeringly illuminated by the peat fire.

"You fellows had better have a drink as well," he said patronizingly. "I want to talk to you. What's yours, landlord?"

O'Rourke poured porter for himself and Quin, and then went over to Shemus.

"The gentleman's standin' treat, *asthore,*" he said. "What'll it be, now?"

"I'm not drinkin' with him," Shemus said uncompromisingly.

Blagdon caught the words and his eyebrows went up, while his already red face took on a purple tinge.

"What's that?" he demanded.

Shemus stroked his violin with loving fingers.

"Ah, ye heard what I said," he replied. "I'm not drinkin' with ye, and I'll give ye three guesses why."

Blagdon got to his feet quickly. The lamplight fell on the fiddler's face with the turn of his head, and the Englishman dropped back into his seat with an altered expression.

"Ah," he said. "I'm sorry—I didn't notice. I didn't notice that you were blind."

"Blind, is it?" Shemus burst out. "Then by the powers I see more than you—that's ridin' clear ahead to the divil! Out of the sea it'll come to ye—"

He spat and broke off again, mysteriously. O'Rourke groaned dramatically. Blagdon laughed.

"You're polite, anyway, my man," he said. "And perhaps you'll tell me, since you seem to know such a devil of a lot, just who it is that's going to do all these pleasant things to me."

"I'll not, then." Shemus laughed bitterly. "I'll not be spoilin' his spoort with ye, me brave lad. Let ye deal with him yerself—when yer time comes."

Blagdon shrugged.

"I don't know what you're driving at," he said. "Is there any one about here, landlord, that'll take a job with me? I want dredgers, masons and handymen, for probably the inside of a month—and I'll pay well."

There was a dead silence again, while O'Rourke and Quin looked anywhere but at the man in the chair. Then Shemus broke into his eldritch cackle once more.

"There's not one of them'd serve ye," he said, "not if ye took and ran down gold itself before them. And that's truth I'm tellin' ye. If 'twas anny use tryin' to talk ye out of this foolishness ye have, I'd tell ye to up anchor and away out of Mara Strand before worse happens to ye. But there, where's the sense in talkin'? Ye'll do what ye're set to do."

"Yes—you can gamble on that, my lad," said Blagdon. "I've not found the thing that'll beat me yet. But what's all this nonsense about men? They told me something the same in Kyleranny when I tried to pick up a few chaps there. What's it all about, landlord?"

O'Rourke hesitated, doubtful of offending a likely customer.

"It's what they're after sayin'," he stammered, "that there'd be bad luck follyin' after them that'd meddle with the ould vessel beyant—"

"Rot!" said Blagdon coarsely. "Mean to tell me you grown men believe in that poppycock? Pack of damned fools!"

"There's more kinds of fools in the world than one," said Shemus with intention, so that Blagdon flushed again.

"That's enough from you, my friend," he snapped. "Now, you others, what about it? Where am I going to get my men?"

"Indeed, yer Honor," said the landlord helplessly, "I'm thinkin' ye'll have

a job of it. Ye see, it's this way—"

He was embarking on a nimble explanation when Shemus suddenly laughed yet once more. The sound broke down the last remains of the Englishman's composure, and he bounced out of his chair with an imprecation.

"Quiet, you!" he bellowed. "I've stood as much as I'm going to stand from you. I see how it is. I'll not get any one round here as long as you're about. Very well, if I can't deal with you myself, I think I know some one who can. And I'm not wasting my time here any longer."

He threw some coins on the table and stamped out, leaving the three over the fire.

FATHER SCANLAN sat in his library in the red brick priest's house.

He was busily engaged in writing in his journal, and an observer who knew him well might have gathered from the frown on his handsome, straightforward face that all was not entirely to his liking. About him in the lamplit room were books, and again books; the same observer would have told you that they formed a pretty complete bibliography of the doings of Philip II's mighty expedition against England, with special reference to its shattered remnants and their end on the savage Irish crags. Over the door was a colored sketch of a three-masted, high pooped vessel, with the words *Santa Agnes* printed underneath it—the galleon legend said had crashed on the tip of Spaniard's Grave.

The father ran his hand through his stiff, bristly hair, and his pen scratched the following words:

"This new Englishman visited me this afternoon. He is highly incensed against the men hereabouts for refusing to enlist with him in raising the *Santa Agnes*. There appears to be, he asserts, a conspiracy against him. This is ridiculous, and I have undertaken to look into it for him. A tactless fellow, but no reason why there should be any concerted feeling opposed to him. If I am not mistaken, this is the fiddler's doing."

Father Scanlan frowned a little as he wrote the last sentence. He and blind Shemus were old antagonists, the father with his stout realism denying flatly that there was anything beyond a pack of nonsense in the fiddler's mystic talk and his reputed second sight. He had thrust on his hat after Blagdon left him and ridden on his bicycle out to O'Rourke's, to discover first hand what might be the trouble. Now he drew a line under his previous entry, and set down his views of the interview with the men.

"The obstinacy of the creatures [he wrote] is unbelievable. Blagdon is offering a wage such as none of them have ever dreamed of—an entire month's work, at least, and at a price that would see them half through the Winter. And yet they refuse. Incredible, pigheaded stupidity!

"This afternoon I cycled out to O'Rourke's to strike at the heart of the matter. There were a dozen men there, staring out at Blagdon's vessels at anchor off the tip of Spaniard's Grave. The man himself was not present, which was just as well, perhaps, since these ignorant fishermen—I should ask pardon for calling them so, but in many matters they are ignorant indeed—would never speak with him about. The innkeeper met me with Patrick Quin; their faces told a tale.

"A hundred yards away, perched on a rock by the sea like some strange bird, Shemus, the fiddler, sat plucking at the strings of his instrument.

" 'I want to see Shemus,' I said to Quin.

"I imagine the two of them knew what for; they would not meet my eye.

" 'He's yonder, your Reverence,' says Patrick in a scared voice. 'But indeed, yer Honor, it'd be better for ye to be leavin' him alone.'

" 'Nonsense!' I said. 'What's on the

lot of you, anyway. Let the pair of you come with me, and we'll see what we'll see.'

"At that I walked down the strand, with the two of them at my heels with the look on their faces I have come to know well enough. Shemus did not turn his head at our footsteps.

" 'It's you, Father,' he said, his blind eyes out to sea. 'And what'll ye be wishin' with me this day?'

" 'Wishing, is it?' I said to him, pretty stiff. 'It's not wishing anything from you I am, Shemus. Demanding's more the word, my lad. As your parish priest, I desire to know what's the meaning of all this bobbery, discouraging the poor lads from taking a piece of work that'll pay them well.'

"He swung about on his rock.

" 'Father,' says he with more than a touch of insolence, 'why d'ye ask me that? Go ask the boys themselves.'

"I do not perhaps suffer quite so much from this Shemus as others, sentimentalists and soft minded ones, do.

" 'Hark you here to me, Shemus,' I said to him. 'There's enough of this twisting and dodging out of you. Either you'll tell me straight out what's in it over this silly business, and we'll have the lads go work for Mr. Blagdon—for well I know it's you that's preventing them—or by the powers I'll discipline you in a manner you'll regret.'

"At that he boggled a little, for excommunication's a thing that's not relished, even by Shemus.

" 'You'd not undherstand, Father,' says he at the last.

" 'A fiddlestick's end!' I told him. 'D'you set up to be instructing me what I'd understand or what I'd not, Shemus—and cock you up for a conceited *bosthoon!*' There are times [the Father wrote with a smile] when the common speech is the only medium of penetrating their thick skulls. '*Arrah,* come you here now!' I said. 'Speak, or you'll know it.'

"Well, at the latter end he was good enough to open his mouth, and a fine tale he told. It seems they're plain scared of interfering with the *Santa Agnes.* To interfere—this was his proposition—with the vessel and its dead after all these years, and for the reasons Blagdon was about to interfere, was seeking trouble. He'd more behind, I believe—some of his second sight nonsense; but that I could not get out of him, either by threats or cajolery.

"The tale is an old one, of course, hereabouts; living in Connaught the time I have, it'd be odd if I'd not met with the like before. And it's true that Spaniard's Grave has always been held a chancy place to visit after dark—like plenty of others in this country. Not the least of a parish priest's difficulties, dear knows, is the combating of just this dark stupidity. A relic of pagan days, before the light came."

He paused, threw down his pen and, chin in hand, contemplated the study, lined with relics and documents bearing on just this *Santa Agnes* he was writing about. Sometimes—not often—Father Scanlan felt that his interest in the galleon was perhaps a trifle mundane and overcurious. However, scholarship was scholarship all the world over, and his interest was in no way morbid. He wrote again:

"I asked Shemus pointedly just what it was he and they were to be frightened of. He stuck his forefeet in at that, like the mule that he is, and what could I get out of him but a packet of hints and suggestions that there were things, once more, that I'd do well remaining ignorant of, and matters in which the cloth's power counted for mighty little.

"Well, I am sorry to say, I lost my temper with him at the end and gave him a powerful dose of the rough end of my tongue. Quin and that poor *omadhaun* O'Rourke drew off a little, as indeed they might—I'll have discipline in my flock or know why—but Shemus stood up to me.

" 'Ah, wait awhile, Father *asthore,*' says he in his high, thin voice. 'It'll

not be long until ye see what I'm meanin', sure enough.

"And beyond that much there was no getting him. I left him, scribbling a note to Blagdon and leaving it with O'Rourke. So far, we must chronicle failure, I fear. There's the influence of this blind charlatan about, and it's strong with the men. No denying that. We shall see."

He laid down his pen once more and rose. It was getting on toward midnight, a time when the father did most of his work. Tonight, the lure of galleon was strong on him, and he went to his crowded shelves and took out a couple of serious looking books.

FOR another hour or more he read the tale of the *Santa Agnes* of Valencia; her wild voyage from the Dunkirk flats, hounded by Drake and Hawkins, up the North Sea, round the Orkneys and away down again, harking back to open water and the friendly ports of Spain. Of the Atlantic storm that struck the half dozen scattered ships southwest of the cape called Bloody Foreland, and their wreck piecemeal on the crags of Donegal and Galway and Clare. Of the massacres of their crews by the Irish wreckers, and of how to this day you find in the western counties men and women of the Spanish lineaments, and of the treasure the vessels carried.

Then he reached into a drawer and took out a portfolio of manuscript, his own handiwork of years, and a secret from all but himself: the history of the great ship down in the clutching sands of Spaniard's Grave, the *Santa Agnes*. Ever since he had assumed his curacy in this wild western spot, the thing had held him in its grip; the fate of the galleon and her crew in that Fall tempest, and the names of the men who went down with her. Father Scanlan in his own practical, matter-of-fact way was an expert on his chosen subject.

He leafed over the scribbled sheets until he came to a section that seemed to have been giving him much thought. There were pictures and drawings, copied, by the look of it, from ancient records, three or four photographs from the same sources, a small pile of correspondence with Spain. From the pictures looked out a face, in various poses and drawn by different hands, but the same face throughout: a dark, smallish personage with a little black mustache and peaked beard above the ruff; a cruel, cold face, with the imperious eyes of a conqueror.

This was the *hidalgo,* Don Felipe Jesu de Olivia, the *Santa Agnes'* commander who had gone down with his ship like a gallant gentleman of Spain. Father Scanlan had developed an interest in this individual, and was at present engaged in tracking his history in the Valencian archives, with results that portrayed a singularly well marked character.

At one in the morning he ended his slow writing, and looked over his latest work with satisfaction.

"The man [he read] was remarkable for one trait in particular. Cruel he may have been, courageous he certainly was—his record in the Indies proves that past all doubting—but his main characteristic, the quality in him that stands out clearest in his entire life as we have it before us, is or rather was [Father Scanlan had had difficulty over the next word, for there were many erasures before he had it written] vindictiveness. The man never forgot an injury or an enemy. A slight, an insult, an interference with his will, he would avenge sooner or later, though it took him years. As, for instance . . ."

Father Scanlan recounted a story of Olivia in the Indies: how an official had roused him from his rest in afternoon siesta to receive some trifling message, and how Olivia, in a fury, had sworn to teach him to respect the privacy of a *hidalgo* of Spain; had pursued him across the ocean, until at last he had come up with him and cleaned the slate

in Madrid. Judging by all evidence, Don Felipe de Olivia was in life a personage whom it was ill to cross. Yet he had fought, so said the record, with the tigerish gallantry of his rank, and the father made no doubt that he had gone down with the galleon, as she crashed on the fanged rocks, sword in hand and with his colors flying above him—the dragon crest he bore.

The father finished reading his paragraph with a smile on his face. He had a very mundane weakness for strong men who stood no nonsense from life, and this Olivia pleased him somehow. He rummaged among the papers and fished out a color sketch of the Don's ramping dragon—the flaming, spitting beast he had borne on ring and banner. Still smiling, though more at himself for a childish piece of sentiment, he imagined the two going down to the green depths together, the dragon hissing and venomous, the Don cold and deliberate, the *hidalgo* to the end.

He rose with a little shiver. It was nearly two o'clock, and he rubbed weary eyes and crossed himself, half amused, half ashamed at his own vivid imaginings. Then he went to bed, with Olivia's dragon still prancing and curveting, crimson-scaled, before his sight.

IT WAS seven of the next morning—a raw, blustery morning of breaking weather—when Father Scanlan was shaving his blue jowls before his mirror. He had slept poorly. Too much Olivia, he reflected ruefully, with a mental reservation to complete his character sketch of the Don at more suitable hours. All night the spiky bearded, dangerous little man of three centuries past had haunted him, and the moaning of the wind, sweeping in with ever increasing force from the Atlantic, had been an appropriate accompaniment to his restless dreams. It was on such a night as this, perhaps, that the *Santa Agnes* had come towering in to the strand, blindly rushing on her end—

Abruptly his meditations were interrupted by a tap at the door. His housekeeper, Mrs. Gerraghty, stood without.

"It's that Patrick Quin, your Reverence," she said through the panels. "He's below, wishful to see your Honor, and not to be put aside; and he's a face on him that's white as a mushroom, the poor fella."

"Tell him I'll be down at once," said the father.

He was used to this sort of thing from his flock. It might be anything from a death to a bad drunk. His face was composed as he entered his study.

Quin sat on the extreme edge of a chair, twisting his cap in his hands, and the first glance told Father Scanlan that this was a serious matter, at least from his parishioner's viewpoint. The man was indeed white and twittering, shifty eyed with terror.

The father tackled him with his usual uncompromising, don't-try-to-blarney-me manner.

"Now, Patrick," said he, "what's all this? Out with it, and be quick about it, for I'm a busy man this day, and I've not eaten me breakfast as yet."

Quin goggled at him.

"Shemus—" he stammered.

Father Scanlan snorted in a manner his flock had come to know.

"That'll be all from you, Patrick!" he said indignantly. "Is it that one ye're comin' to bother me with, and it not seven in the day? Think shame to yourself, Patrick Quin! What craziness is in this time?"

He went out into his living room and sat down to his breakfast. Quin followed him in the manner of one who did not greatly care to be left alone.

"It's what he's after sayin', yer Reverence," said he hastily, "that there's a little man—"

Father Scanlon put the teapot down and fixed Quin with a rolling eye of doom.

"Patrick Quin," he began, "if I was a

cursin' man I'd skin the hide from ye this minute for a ravin', babblin' scamp! Don't ye be pesterin' me with Shemuses and little men and the like. I've other things to do than listen to such blandandherin's, and well ye know it. Out with ye now, and leave me in peace!"

But Quin stood his ground desperately.

"It's what he's sayin'," he repeated, "that there was a little man comin' visitin' with him lasht night, a little man out of the sea, and with him a swoord at his side and grand clothes upon him. Never a word he'd say, says Shemus, only to be moppin' and mowin', and frownin' very savage like he was put out over somethin', he'd not tell what. All night he was visitin' him, comin' and goin', back and foorth—"

Scanlan had stopped eating and was regarding Quin full eyed and with much contempt.

"Humph!" he said. "A pretty story, Patrick. And how much of O'Rourke's porter did the lot of ye drink last night? A mighty deal, I've no doubt, for Shemus, that's a blind man, to see so much on a sudden."

Quin gulped.

"It's blind Shemus is in his eyes, Father, as is well known enough; but indeed that one sees matters that's hidden from others, say what ye like. He'd the likeness of this one so plain ye'd believe he had drawed it out before him. Little he was, says Shemus, and angry, and a sharp swoord like strapped to him—and he'd a beard, a pointed beard."

He stopped, looking over his shoulder. Father Scanlan was not laughing or frowning now. He had apparently forgotten his breakfast for the moment.

"H'm! Say that last again, Patrick, will ye?"

Quin repeated it hoarsely. He was in a pitiable state of nerves. The father stared at him for a long minute in complete silence. Then he drank a cup of tea in the manner of a man whose mind is made up.

"Mrs. Gerraghty," he called out into the kitchen, "do ye be fetchin' Tim Phelan this way and tellin' him to throw the harness on the mare. I'll be dhrivin' down to O'Rourke's at once. And give Patrick Quin here the sign o' breakfast and a suppeen of whisky, for the creature's had a fright. Patrick—" he turned to Quin—"I'll come back with ye and see into this. There's no one seein' visions in Mara without I'm knowin' about it. I've no manner of doubt that it's just another of Shemus' tricks, mind ye—and I'll give that playboy somethin' that'll do him no manner of good when I see him. Little men with swords, indeed! *Arrah,* what next?"

He plunged into his breakfast, ruddy faced, competent, matter-of-fact. Quin went out to the kitchen and got his tot of whisky. As he swallowed it, the sympathetic Mrs. Gerraghty heard him mutter—

"Holy Mother of God!"

THERE was one figure on Mara Strand when Father Scanlan drove up on that rainy morning. One, and no more. The rest had apparently gone to ground, and there were no loafers supporting with their backs the whitewashed walls of O'Rourke's tavern.

Only Shemus, his queer mop of orange hair blowing in the wind, sat still on his rock, with the lemon colored old violin huddled under his coat. Out at sea, a mile away, the steamer and barge swung slowly in a falling swell; but behind them the day was threatening, with ominous clouds driving heavily across the leaden sky.

Father Scanlan pulled up the mare and dismounted, and as he did so O'Rourke's door opened and Blagdon came out in a hurry. He approached the priest.

"Good morning, Father," he said. "Where's everybody? I came ashore for another crack at these fellows. I must have some of them."

"Then maybe ye didn't hear any tales of little men with swords," Father Scanlan asked with sarcasm directed mainly at Quin. "This lad here's in to me this mornin' with a story that'd choke ye listenin' to it—some more poppycock out of our friend yonder, I b'lieve." He nodded across at Shemus.

"Him?" Blagdon's face turned dark with anger. "For about tuppence I'd set about that chap, blind or not. He's put every man in the place against me. I've told you that before, though. What's his latest?"

Father Scanlan briefly narrated Quin's report. Blagdon sneered.

"Well, of all the arrant idiocy!" he exploded. "You people out here must be lunatics, the lot of you. Surely you're not influenced by that kind of thing, Father?"

"Certainly not!" Father Scanlan bristled at once. "It's foolishness, in the first place, and the Church doesn't tolerate it besides. It's my duty here to stamp this heathen business out, and that's why I'm here this mornin'. Come you now and we'll settle this Shemus once for all."

Quin had discreetly vanished round the corner of the house, and Blagdon and the father once again approached Shemus. This time he heard them coming and got up from his stone to meet them. The rain had ceased and he had taken his instrument from under his arm. His peaked, ethereal features were more transparent than ever, and his blank eyes, slate-blue and distant, seemed to look away beyond everyday matters into some infinity of his own. He stood in an attitude rather defensive than provoking and waited for Father Scanlan to speak first.

"Well, me splendid lad!" began the father with ferocious geniality. "Ye've done for yourself now. Little men with swords, eh, that's visitin' you, wasn't it, all the night long? And you sober at that. Witchcraft, that's what it is, Shemus—black witchcraft. Ye're in deadly sin this minute, d'ye know that? I'll have to exorcise ye, next—and then there'll be a penance that'll make ye sit up. Though indeed," he added grimly, "I'm thinkin' that the kind of penance ye're needin' is the stroke of a sound blackthorn across the backside of ye, to drive this wickedness from ye. What have ye to say for yourself, you with your little men that's visitin' ye?"

The blind man did not answer him directly. He peered unseeing at the Englishman.

"That's himself, is it not?" he inquired in a blunted voice, from which the life appeared to have been drained. "The fine lad that's afther disturbin' the ould ancient bones that's lyin below? Man—" he raised a thin hand—"can ye not take a warnin'? Ye've had one already—'twas meself give it ye—for even yesterday itself was shown me what'd come to ye. But now lishten here to me—"

"That's enough!" said Father Scanlan very sharply, but the blind man continued.

"Beggin' your pardon, Father, but this man must lishten to me, that's a dead man where he stands this minute. Drop your pryin' and pokin' about the bones of the dead yondher, Blagdon. There's one that's after ye—meself I seen him, a dozen times this night, and it's you he's seekin'. Out of the sea he's come, and back to the sea he'll go—but not until he's finished with you. Go back now to your vessels and up anchor and out o' this, like the devil himself was after ye; and if ye live to be a thousand, it's to me ye owe yer life!"

"Oh—!" Blagdon burst out with a coarse expletive, and would have said more, but Father Scanlan restrained him.

"Whisht!" he said. "The man's possessed. Leave him to me. Go walk a piece on the strand there . . . What's this boat that's comin' in?"

Blagdon cast a glance at it.

"I don't know," he said. "They're in a hurry, whoever they are. It's Jenkins, the mate, in the bows there," he added, looking under his hand.

The big Englishman went down to the water's edge, while Father Scanlan commenced addressing Shemus in a soothing undertone. The priest looked genuinely worried over the blind man's mental condition.

The boat grounded in the surf and Jenkins leaped out, splashing ashore. He addressed Blagdon with an expression of the utmost concern.

"You'd better come aboard, sir," he said. "We've lost a diver!"

Blagdon swore again.

"The hell you have!" he exclaimed. "And how did that happen, eh?"

"Hard to say, sir," the mate said in an undertone. "I'd sooner you saw the skipper. There's something queer about it, if you ask me."

"Oh, for God's sake, man!" Blagdon shook his fists in the air. "That's enough of this 'queer' business. I've had nothing else all the morning already. Father," he called to the priest, "come here a minute and listen to this."

Father Scanlan came down, with Shemus at his heels. He heard Blagdon's brief and sulphurous statement in silence. Shemus, behind him, made a strange noise, half laugh, half sob.

"You'd better come aboard with me," said Blagdon thickly. "You may be wanted there, for all I know—confound 'em for a set of ninnies!"

Father Scanlan nodded; his face was grave. The boat took Blagdon and himself across the confused strip of gray water, and the steamer's skipper, a hard looking seaman out of London River, met them at the gangway.

"It's Kennett, sir," he said. "A bad business."

"Well," said Blagdon testily, "what happened? Out with it! Accident, I suppose."

"Ye-es," said the skipper. "I suppose so, sir. But it was a funny kind of an accident. I saw the whole thing."

"What the devil do you mean?" asked Blagdon.

"Just this, sir, if you'll listen. Kennett's an old navy man, and he's been using the sea for a matter of twenty years or better. It's not like him to make a mistake."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, all I've to say is, it's odd. I was on the bridge, and Kennett came out of the house and walked forward. I said something to him about the weather and he answered me. He started testing a new piece of manila for this afternoon's diving, looking it over and trying it. He'd got it bent to a stay—there it is, sir—and began to take a strain on it. I was watching him, as it happens. All of a sudden the thing parts, snap! like that. New manila rope."

"Well?"

"Nothing, sir—only Kennett, he staggers back, hits his head a shocking clout against a stanchion, and he's overboard and sunk like a dipsey lead before you could whistle."

Blagdon stooped and picked up the broken end of the rope.

"Well," he said, "what's all the queerness in that? Flawed rope, that's all. We'll be able to claim from the underwriters for Kennett, poor chap. I'm sorry—very sorry—but why the other fuss? You've seen this sort of thing before, Skipper."

The captain looked extremely uncomfortable.

"It's just this, sir," he said. "The men are saying—"

Blagdon turned purple.

"Shut your silly mouth!" he bellowed. "Good gad, you a skipper and listening to a pack of old wives' tales. Dammit, man, take a pull on yourself! Is the whole world crazy?"

The seaman preserved a sulky silence and Father Scanlan looked about him curiously. A dripping and melancholy little procession came down the deck. Kennett's body was in the middle of it, and a murmur went up from the ship's company as it went past.

"Maybe ye'd better set me ashore," said the father. "There'll be arrangements necessary for that poor man.

He's not a Cath'lic, I've no doubt—but I'll get in touch at once with his own priest."

"Do that," said Blagdon. "I'll be very grateful to you, Father. And while I'm about it, I'll come ashore with you too. I've some telegraphing to do. We'll want another diver."

He turned at the gangway, addressing the skipper.

"Carry on, please," he said. "There's no reason why we should let this—"

Crash! The nine-inch block from the peak of the diver's hoist missed his head by inches and thundered on the deck. The skipper went white as a sheet, Father Scanlan crossed himself mechanically, and Blagdon, after an instant's stupid staring, roared out an imprecation that made the ship shake.

"What nine-times-condemned son of a she-jackass did that?" he yelled, crimson with fury. "You, Jenkins, who fixed that block?"

The mate was still shaking with fear.

"It's—it's been in place since we left Tyne," he said. "We—we were slingin' cement with it this mornin'."

Blagdon stooped and picked the thing up.

"Look at that!" he said, pointing to the shackle. "Broken—sheared clean away! Skipper, what the devil d'ye mean by carrying defective gear like this, eh?"

The skipper took the block and turned it over in his stubby hands.

"Thirty-one years I've been at sea, Mr. Blagdon," he said slowly. "But I never saw a forged shackle go like that—with no weight on it. Nor any one else, either," he added under his breath. He met his owner's eye squarely. "Well, sir?" he asked.

"Well what, you ass?" Blagdon demanded brutally. "Is this another of your maiden aunt imaginings? Carry on, please, every one. Come along, Father—we'll go ashore."

They went over the side in a sullen silence. Blagdon himself took the oars.

"Make anything of that?" he asked suddenly, almost indifferently.

Father Scanlan shook his head.

"I'm no seaman," he said noncommittally.

"Just an accident—two accidents." Blagdon's tone was obstinate. He had shown no sign of fear whatever at the escape. "It's not going to bulldoze me."

ONCE more Father Scanlan sat in his study, his journal open before him. It was three days later, and he was writing it up, with many head shakings and now and again a soft ejaculation betraying something like bewilderment. The cause of his perturbation appeared to be Shemus, the fiddler, with whom he had been having, as it appeared, a series of extremely difficult interviews.

"The man is an odd case, a very odd case [he wrote]. Indeed, if there were not so many perfectly definite evidences to the contrary, I should set him down as a case of delusionary insanity. Yet the fellow is, I am entirely certain, not insane—not even weak minded. Indeed, I sometimes am half inclined to suspect that blind Shemus [he checked himself on the point of writing "sees more than any of us"] is better equipped mentally than many of his fellows. He is a puzzle, and, I am frank to say, the most difficult case it has been my lot to deal with."

He stopped writing and filled a big pipe of curved black briar. Then he sat back in his chair, chin down on his clerical collar, protruding blue eyes staring into the shadows outside the lamp's ring of light. His hands—the strong, capable hands of the peasant—toyed nervously with the plain gold cross at the end of his watch chain. A close observer would have said that Father Scanlan was a little worried.

He was, and more than a little. He thought for many minutes before his pen started once more.

"I do not [he wrote further] believe in the supernatural. That is to say, in the reappearance in any form of the or-

dinary dead. Nor have I any credence in the commonly believed-in spirits of the countryside—the fairies, the leprechauns, the banshees and so on. They are either relics of paganry, or mere natural phenomena distorted by ignorant minds into manifestations more or less terrifying, but harmless enough. In these I see no great evil. It is a series of beliefs that will probably never be entirely eradicated from any backward countryside.

"But what am I to say to this—?"

He commenced a new paragraph, stopped, ran his penholder through his hair once more, then flung it down almost petulantly on the table before him. Thrusting his chair back, he rose and began to pace the room, his lips moving soundlessly. Finally he sighed and sat down.

"But what am I to say to this? This Shemus has past all doubt seen something. I believe I am competent to assay sincerity when it comes my way. His tale sticks together, holds water always. He is unshaken by any threats or on any persuasion. And, moreover, he is frightened; badly frightened. Not with the idiotic panic of his fellows—Quin and the like, who would run from the shadow of a goose in the moonlight—but with honest and, I admit, rather terrible fear. It is not in the least like Shemus to give way thus. He is in general as conceited a local celebrity as you will find in Ireland. There is no conceit or pose in this.

"He says, and sticks to it [the father wrote], that he is visited by a man out of the sea, threatening harm to Blagdon and his enterprise. He describes his visit, and with a great deal more detail than I like—a great deal more. I do not believe that any one else, whether in Connaught or elsewhere, has collected any details about Olivia. I should be almost ready to make oath that I am the only one. Then how is it that Shemus, the blind, and in certain senses ignorant, fiddler can describe in detail—"

The firm writing tailed off abruptly. Father Scanlan shied violently from finishing that sentence. He let his mind wander back over the events of the last three days, duly chronicled in the scribbled pages lying under the lamp.

Blagdon's operations had continued, despite the unfavorable weather. His divers—the new man had come out from England—had been down, exploring the underwater crags and weedy nooks of Spaniard's Grave. There had been, it seemed, a certain amount of difficulty with the crew, and one or two further untoward accidents. Once a boat had been stove between steamer and dredge, by an odd lurch of the former; a dynamite cartridge, set in a rock cleft to blow aside a hampering spur, had blown prematurely; and once, too, a rope, flying overside with a heavy weight tied to it, had whipped the feet from under a man and come within an ace of taking him with it.

All of them were accidents that might well have occurred singly and to different individuals. But the father's face was dark and his brow clouded as he completed the picture. Blagdon had been in the crushed boat, Blagdon had been peering over the gunwale down into the shallow water when the dynamite went off and nearly drowned him; it had been Blagdon whom the rope had banged against the steamer's rail, to be hauled to safety, bruised and half stunned.

The bare facts were down in the journal, but Father Scanlan had an odd disinclination to make further comment upon them. An assault was being committed against his case-hardened practicality and unemotional habit of mind; and he found the assault very trying.

ONCE again he looked at the sketches of the Don, and the representation of the crawling, furious dragon. He took one of the latter up and held it close to the lamp, curiously studying its mi-

nutely distinguished scales and plates in crimson, rose and blue-green, the jets of orange fire from its pictured jaws. Then he put the thing away and closed the portfolio as there came a knock at his outer door.

Blagdon burst into the room. The big man was in a state of considerable excitement.

"Father," he said, "you've been a great help in this business, and I'm more than thankful to you. Besides, you know a lot about this galleon and the treasure. That's why I came to you first. What d'ye make of that?"

He threw a blackened disk down on the table.

"One of the dredges brought it up late this evening," he said triumphantly. "D'ye think it's—"

Father Scanlan picked it up and scrutinized it minutely.

"H'm!" he said, weighing it in his hand. "Looks like it, I'll admit. Ye've not tested it, I suppose?"

"No," Blagdon admitted ruefully. "That's one thing I managed to forget—muriatic. Fool's trick, and my own fault, too. But it's gold by the weight, eh?"

"Wait awhile, now," said the father. "Maybe there's a better way of doin' things than that. A touch of spirits, now, and a brush—" He went outside and returned with a bottle. " 'Tis cleanin' salts I'm keepin' by me for polishin' the vessels, but maybe the Church'll not object if we use a drop on this fellow."

Much scrubbing cleaned enough of the tarnish from the metal to disclose the pattern. Father Scanlan peered at it closely; then he straightened up.

"That's a doubloon," he said. "I've pictures of the like among my books here. Wait, while I show ye."

He dragged another heavy volume down and showed an illustration of the coins of Philip II. From the faint marks on the stained coin in their hands there was no doubt as to its identity. Blagdon swore under his breath with delight, but Father Scanlan affected not to hear him.

"Ye must be close," he said. "Very close."

"That's what I thought about it," Blagdon said. "I've the electrics rigged tonight and the crew are still working. They'll go on till dawn if necessary—I've offered a reward of a hundred pounds to the man that strikes the treasure room, or what's left of it, first. But I thought I'd drive in here first and get you to verify this."

Father Scanlan looked at him a second, peculiarly. The man's eyes shone, and his whole face was transfigured with greed.

"Any more trouble?" the father asked.

"What d'ye mean? Accidents? No, nothing more—looks as if the luck's changed. Why?"

"Ye've seen nothin' more of our blind friend?"

"Nothing more. He buttonholed me as I was coming in this evening, outside O'Rourke's. Judging by him, my number's up—his little man's hot on my trail, and I'm liable to be removed any minute. You never heard such a string of nonsense in your life! The man's mad."

"H'm!" said the priest. "Maybe. Or deluded. Let's hope it's the latter."

Blagdon stared at him.

"Why, what's all this?" he asked. "Surely you're not backing him up? You—an educated man?"

Father Scanlan pinched his lower lip between a perturbed thumb and finger, looking at the Englishman with a baffled expression. He made as if to say something, thought better of it and turned away. Blagdon was still watching him intently.

"Well?" he demanded. "You haven't answered me, Father. You don't believe in this 'little man' stuff? Who'd he be, anyway?"

The priest's eyes strayed irresistibly to the closed portfolio on the desk. For the first time in his life Father Scanlan

was assailed by doubts—whirling, confused doubts. His head spun with his emotions, and he stammered a little in his speech.

"Mr. Blagdon," he said solemnly, "maybe ye'll say I'm mad, the way Shemus the fiddler's mad too. I don't know. There's things— Listen here, now. I'm not speakin' as a priest, or any way except as one man to another. Would ye on any terms whatever—any terms—consent to give up this search of yours and go home? No, don't interrupt—there's no need for passion, either. I'm between the devil—yes, I believe it's himself—and the deep sea here. It's flat against every belief I've ever held, and still do hold, maybe; I trust I'll still have beliefs after this affair. But it's my duty toward you, Mr. Blagdon, and that's stronger than any beliefs of mine. D'ye remember what kind of a little man it was Shemus is speakin' of all the time?"

Blagdon was regarding him with dropped jaw, as if he expected the father to go mad on the spot; but at Shemus' name his face cleared of surprise and once more anger and contempt swept over it.

"That charlatan of yours!" he growled. "That hysterical cripple!"

"But ye do remember?" said the father.

"Of course I remember. Think I'm likely to forget? It's been dinned into me often enough this week, Lord knows."

"Then, Mr. Blagdon," said Father Scanlan, "take a look at this!"

He laid his hand on the closed portfolio; but lifted it at once as the outer door slammed and there was the sound of hurried footsteps in the passage outside. A knock rattled on the woodwork. Blagdon and the priest turned their heads.

"Come in!" said Father Scanlan.

Jenkins, the mate, almost fell into the room. He thrust forward, wordlessly, a handful of blackened disks, identical with the one on the table.

"We've found it, sir!" he announced shakily. "It's the treasure all right. They were bringin' these up by the bucketfuls when I left!"

Blagdon's eyes stood out of his head as he grabbed the stuff from the mate's hands. He began to dance a crazy fandango on the study floor.

"Gold!" he bawled. "Gold! Look at it, will you! And there's supposed to be a million there!"

He broke off, choking. Father Scanlan suddenly tapped the mate on the arm.

"Leave us a minute, will ye?" he asked in a husky whisper.

He was very pale all of a sudden.

"Blagdon," he said tensely, "ye'll think I'm mad beyond the shadow of a doubt. Maybe I am—as God's above me I don't know this minute. But if it's the last thing I'm to say to ye—haul up your anchor out of that place, throw these things back, and out of this and away. Now—at once!"

He fell back into a chair and covered his face with his hands; they were shaking. Blagdon looked down at him, and then at the handful of blackened, crusted coins. A dull, uncomprehending look came over his countenance, to be replaced by the blaze of greed. He broke into a bellow of laughter.

"Likely!" he said. "Think I'm going to drop this now? Hell, no—I'm not a fool!"

Father Scanlan took his finger from before his eyes, and got up slowly.

"Then where you go this night, I go," he said. "That's all there is to it."

THEY had rigged half a dozen electrics on the steamer and dredge, and the scene was weirdly lighted up by their blue-white light. The night had fallen, still and suddenly oppressive, with an opaque bank of vapor low down on the horizon out to sea, and a continuation of the slow ground swell that made the anchored vessels lurch and wallow. There was no rain, but it would come

later; the glass was dropping like a stone.

Father Scanlan and Blagdon stood on the steamer's unsteady deck, watching the divers descend and rise again in the shallow water. The rest of the crew, their sulks forgotten, were gathered about the hoist, and as each helmeted man was hauled in and laid his catch on the deck there was a mutter of excitement.

The skipper kept jealous guard over the spoils. Apparently the divers had reached the bowels of the galleon, and the objects therein were still fairly undisturbed. There was a growing heap of the stained gold coins, three or four shapeless lumps of rust that might or might not have been morions; the lock of an ancient chest, also a lump of rust. Trip by trip the divers brought in more relics, until the pile began to assume proportions that made even Father Scanlan stare.

The priest was uncomfortable and nervous. The blind man's certainty and unshaken obstinacy in his account of the being that had—the father shied once more at the word, but there did not seem to be any other for it—haunted him for the last week had created a profound impression on his mind, filled as it was with the peculiar details of the appearance in life of Felipe de Olivia. There was something a great deal more than coincidence in that—and in the series of happenings, out of the way to say the least of them, on the steamer since dredging operations had commenced. Blagdon was entirely hopeless now, of course; no influence would check his desire for the gold, and presumably his men were in the same state of eagerness. Father Scanlan felt in the position of one compelled to watch tragedy developing, without being able to lift a finger to stay it.

And yet, the affair was absurd. With an effort of his strong will he wrenched his mind back from these speculations and watched with interest the treasure of the Spaniard being extracted from its three-hundred-year-old secrecy beneath the waves. Beyond any doubt at all they had tapped Olivia's treasure; it was coming up in bucketfuls at a time. Blagdon fairly hopped with excitement.

It was nearly midnight by now and the loom from the west had crept over the sky. One or two catspaws of wind, tentative squalls, had swept down on them, forerunners of the storm to come. The skipper looked anxiously at Blagdon, but his employer was far too occupied with results to notice a minor affair like weather. The lurching of the steamer increased and the divers' work grew more and more hazardous.

On a sudden Father Scanlan pricked up his ears. Faint but clear, from the spit of black rocks to windward of the ships, came the eery note of the blind man's violin. The priest, straining his eyes through the murk, could make him out, once more perched on a rock, teasing the strings into a wailing melody of halftones.

Blagdon swung about and saw him as well.

"That blackguard again!" he growled. "If I'd a gun handy I'd take a—hey, you there!" he shouted into the rising wind. "Take yourself off out of that, or it'll be the worse for you. D'ye hear me!"

Shemus was out of voice range, and the violin continued. A gust of wind, far stronger than the rest, came swooping down and struck the steamer till she staggered. The crew at the rail drew back, grumbling among themselves and casting anxious glances to weather. The skipper approached Blagdon and spoke to him in a low tone.

"Oh, all right!" Blagdon said angrily. "Have it your own way, Skipper! Make this the last dive then!"

THERE was a man on the bottom, his ropes and pipe descending into the slapping waves. He had been down a slightly longer time than usual—ten minutes at least—and the crowd gathered once more round the sailor at the

deck end of his telephone. Father Scanlan drew in toward them, an indefinable presentiment gripping him; and as he did so the squall shrieked down out of the dark.

"Up!" the skipper roared through cupped hands to the man at the donkey engine. The little machine sputtered, ropes tightened and, as the steamer rocked under the savage blows of the wind, the great bulge of the divers' helmet broke the surface of the sea.

The haul was a small one this time, for the man held it in one of his gloves. In the glitter of the lights it showed as a straight bar of steel or iron, possibly a foot in length, and gnawed and corroded by the sea; at one end there was a boss of metal less rusted than the rest, and Father Scanlan felt his heart check and falter at the glimpse of it.

Blagdon looked it over cursorily.

"It's a sword—" he began.

There was a snap and a crackle overhead as the festooned electric cables between the barge and the steamer broke with a sudden lurch of the two ships. Darkness descended like a blanket on the wet decks, even as Father Scanlan had sprung forward at Blagdon's last word. A sharp flurry of rain whipped down across their faces.

Confusion followed. The wind shrieked more and more savagely, and the steamer floundered like a foul-hooked fish at the end of her anchor chain. Men fell and stumbled over each other in the sudden squall; someone blundered into the priest and drove him against the ship's rail. Clinging there, he heard a sudden bump and a gasping thud—then silence, and a man's voice:

" 'Ere!" it said. "Fer Gawd's sake, get them lights on! There's some one 'urt 'ere!"

Father Scanlan did not need telling more. With a bound he was at the man's side. A heavy body, dimly discernible against the planking, lay at his feet.

"Strike a match there," he commanded. "Hurry!"

The sputtering thing, sheltered in cupped hands, went out twice before its yellow flame flared up to die instantly in the wind. Yet it lived long enough to show Blagdon prone on the deck, the rusted sword blade driven through his heart.

By all evidence, Blagdon had slipped on the treacherous deck and fallen on the weapon. To all outward evidence, that is. For in that infinitesimal flicker of light, Father Scanlon, fallen to his knees on the wet boards and trembling like an aspen, had seen, faint but unmistakable, the ramping heraldic dragon and the cruel and relentless visage of Felipe Jesu de Olivia, sometime *hidalgo* of Spain . . .

And that is why Father Dominick Scanlan of Mara in the Province of Connaught went into a six months' retreat in a monastery, having first burned his journal and cast his books and the blackened doubloon far into the sea from Spaniard's Grave; and why, also, you will never get him to discuss the occult in any of its forms. He is a greatly changed man, is Father Scanlan, and no longer insists with quite so much vigor that his parishioners use common sense. He will not tell you this tale, either; his mouth is shut on the whole business, and Mara's as well, save behind shuttered windows and with many a glance over the shoulder. They still talk sometimes thus of the man from the sea.

Only Shemus of the Sight goes down to the shore and sits there, a frail wraith, on the slippery low water rocks. He, too, has no answer to your questionings save a new and most disturbing melody on his old yellow violin.

SUNSTROKE

A Story of the Foreign Legion

By GEORGES SURDEZ

LEGIONNAIRE MAUFLER returned from Indo-China to Algeria, as a third class passenger aboard the *Malaisie,* several months before the bulk of the detachment with which he had gone out on the government transport *Mythos,* because he had suffered sunstroke and, as his military booklet stated, "must be kept under observation". He was nominally under the orders of a sergeant of his battalion, traveling in the second class, invalided for pernicious anemia. As a matter of fact, he found himself independent for the first time in many years.

He was tall, blond; a gaunt, soldierly man nearly forty. His jaws were large and a big nose jutted above a yellow mustache. His eyes were small, deeply sunk under his tanned brows, very blue, holding a haunting, half mad glint. His khaki uniform fitted him, his white helmet was speckless, the buttons shone on his coat like gold.

His high, trim silhouette was conspicuous from the start, for he kept to himself, did not mix with the crowd in the steerage. The Legion uniform and the medals lined on his chest soon attracted the attention of first class passengers with time hanging heavily on their hands. On the third day out, a steward was sent down to invite him to the bar for a drink. Maufler proved a find, talked readily and well.

"Yes, I suffered a sunstroke—the Tonkinese sort. Gets you like a club on the base of the neck, and down you go. It happened in a blockhouse on the Chinese border. I was off duty, loafing. It was a dark day. You know—sort of a heavy mist clouding the sky, with the sun show-

ing through like a washed out moon. I hear that certain rays, ultra violet or something like that, seep through. What I am certain of is that, when I removed my helmet for a moment, I passed out and woke up in the hospital six weeks later. I became sort of absent minded and queer after that, and the doctors decided to send me back to Algeria. I am to be kept under observation."

His listeners nodded understanding. The majority were colonials, and had either seen or heard of such cases. Nine-tenths of the odd yarns told of Frenchmen in the Tonkin were explained by that single word—sunstroke.

"I couldn't remember anything. I had fórgotten who I was. They told me my name was Ferdinand Maufler, that I was a Legionnaire. See those medals? I can't remember winning them and, when I read the citations in my record, I wonder how I came to do such things. I had forgotten how to read, too, and had to learn the alphabet all over again. It came back very quickly, though—in a few days. No, no water in that, please; my stomach is not very strong.

"Do I recall anything of my past? Yes, a few incidents that happened in the Legion, some friends. It's coming back gradually, but my life is still mostly blank. Were I discharged now, gentlemen, I wouldn't know where to go. Anything before my enlistment? I can't say. Yes and no—it may be something I dreamed about when I was delirious. I was raving for weeks, you know. It isn't clear, that one memory. I'll try to tell it, if you won't take it seriously.

"I seem to see a long flight of curving stone steps shining in the sun, pillars, a huge garden, more like a park, with trimmed, conical trees and beds of flowers. There are men about, big fellows with tall helmets and plates on their chests, something like our Cuirassiers, only in white. Then there's a kid climbing the stairs, hanging on to a lady's skirt. I can hear the silk rustling. Maybe I am one of the guys with the helmets. Yes, I'll take a peppermint for a change.

"I can remember something that's said, too. I don't know if it belongs to any language. Here goes—" Maufler uttered a few syllables, laughed shyly. "Russian? Don't kid me. I'm sure I never knew Russian."

By the end of the first week at sea Maufler's story had lost its novelty; but those who had invited him felt that they could not ignore him. The Legionnaire never sought them, never pushed himself forward. He could be seen strolling below, on the third class deck, lonely, aloof from the others. When he chanced to glance upward and see a familiar face, he would salute discreetly. Few could resist his patience and dignity, and a steward would be sent down to invite him to the bar. Children loved him at sight, mothers trusted their babies' instinct. Maufler was respectful, gentlemanly.

"Do you like being a soldier, Monsieur Maufler?"

"That's all I am fit for, madam. The life of a professional soldier seems lonely to you. I have thought it was at times. But I miss my comrades now. You see, when we are a few Legionnaires together, we get along somehow, lack for nothing. At present, I am alone aboard. No arrangements were made for me to draw pay during the trip; the wine served us below is sour; I can't always afford cigarets. But I am a hardened man, madam, and probably have known much worse days in the past. One acquires philosophy. Privations, hardships—they are nothing. What hurts is contrast; one longs for a home, for love, for children."

His confidences were repeated; discreet contributions were forced upon him. According to regulations, he was not allowed ashore in foreign ports. But his friends brought him postal cards and souvenirs. When the *Malaisie* left Naples for Oran, where Maufler was to land, he had enough to fill a brand new tin trunk, Useless junk for a Legionnaire, but which might bring money when sold as personal mementoes.

A first class steward, a round faced,

jovial southern Frenchman, had come to watch him. Maufler granted him a single glance, shrugged and went on with his preparations.

"You remember me, don't you?"

"What about that?"

"I've been listening to you. You're just about as much a Russian as I am the Queen of Spain—"

"I didn't say I was Russian," Maufler protested. "They did."

"You worked hard enough to give them that impression. You got that bunk about the marble stairs and the guards out of a book. I know you recognized me from the first. Why not? I know your whole family. A gang of grafters. When your brother started to get ahead in politics, became a deputy, member of various commissions, you were in the way. Everybody knew you wouldn't work if you could help it; and, after all, it would have been a little too raw for your brother to stick you in an important job. So he talked you into joining the Legion."

"I'm not so sure I know you."

Maufler straightened, lighted a cork tipped cigaret taken from an enormous box.

"I'll make you sure, if I have to. Say, I've been letting you get away with it for a purpose. I want two hundred francs of your graft, or I'll butt in on your gab and tell them who you are. I don't think I'm asking much."

"No," Maufler agreed, nodding. "Listen, I can't take off my money belt in front of all those bums. They'd rob me. Meet you on deck in a few minutes."

"I'll be waiting."

Left alone, Maufler locked his trunk, strung the keys on a cord which he tied around his neck. Then he went on deck leisurely. The steward was waiting. Unfortunately, when the Legionnaire lifted his képi to greet a friend, he dropped like a felled ox.

The treacherous sun had found him out, and he spent the rest of the voyage in the ship's sick ward. He stared into space, mumbled vague words. At Oran, the greedy steward saw him carried ashore on a stretcher, with sad and suspicious eyes. But there was nothing he could do, and the doctor shamed him for his suspicions.

"He got careless, that's what. His booklet, signed by the head surgeon at Hanoi, states, 'Must be kept under observation!' "

MAUFLER had found a new career, which was to lead him far. Taken to the military hospital, he spent the following fortnight in a clean cot, smoking cigarets, reading illustrated papers provided by the Red Cross ladies. His booklet was a modern Aladdin's lamp, and the magic formula was: "Must be kept under observation".

When the head surgeon found him playing checkers with another sick man, he gently suggested that Maufler, who was perfectly healthy save for the lingering effects of sunstroke, should make himself useful.

"Yes, Major," Maufler accepted gratefully.

But it was evident very soon that his memory was poor, that he could not concentrate on any task. Somewhere within his brain, cogs warped by the Tonkinese sun failed to mesh. Sent with a tray of food to the officers' ward, he would be located seated on the garden wall, hours later. When ordered to sweep a room, he would set to work willingly. Within ten minutes he would be seen standing in the center of the floor, staring at scattered garbage, seeming to wonder what to do next.

Legionnaire Maufler was suspected of simulation; traps were set for him. Nothing was proved, for mental disorders take unexpected forms, and he might have been the luckless victim of his malady. It was quite possible that he could forget an errand, forget what he held a broom for; and that he might recall lending three francs sixty centimes to a comrade after a lapse of days.

"I don't want to see him around any

longer," the head surgeon said after two months. "Get him out."

"How?" his assistant wondered. "Can't discharge him—we can't say he is incurable. He *may* be sick."

"Kill him, poison him, but get rid of him. Or we'll have more malingerers than we can board."

Maufler was slated to go to the Oran Villa for convalescents, a semi-civilian institution. There the inmates were supposed to do light work, as an aid to their cure. Maufler never forgot a meal, never forgot that he had leave to go to the cinema on Wednesday night, but could not think of labor. All efforts were made in vain. When he was discovered hoeing the vegetable garden with a cue brought from the billiard room, the old captain in charge exploded.

"I've been in the Legion thirty years. I know a faker when I see one. Work or get out. You'll go back to an active company on Monday unless you snap out of your trance."

"To Sidi-bel-Abbès, Captain?"

"That's it."

"Please send me back, Captain. I think I could drill and march all right. It's anything like this that bothers me. I can't think." Maufler paused, added, "And there are Legion doctors there who know what Tonkinese sunstroke can do to a guy."

"We'll see, we'll see," the captain grumbled.

Maufler had taken the right course. The captain knew that, should he dismiss Maufler as a faker, the fellow might do something which would prove he was unbalanced. Then there would be an investigation, accusations of carelessness, of which the manager of the villa would get his full share. And then—one could never be sure about sunstroke and its after effects.

Maufler remained a first period of forty-five days at the villa, obtained an extension of convalescence of thirty more. He was dismissed only when, his last savings gone, he found outside employment in his spare time to earn money for drink. But as his sanity was still in doubt, as he was a veteran serving a third enlistment, wearing several medals, no charges were sent in against him.

At Sidi-bel-Abbès, in a regular company, he drove every one to despair. Rational enough in private life, able to play cards and win, he became slow, absent minded when in the ranks, misunderstood orders, turned left instead of right, threw formations into confusion. When he was punished he appealed to the doctor, exhibited his booklet.

"Must be kept under observation."

Sidi-bel-Abbès got rid of him by sending him to Saida, another training depot. There, all was well for a week. Then Maufler collapsed, complaining of terrific aches in his head. Again he entered the hospital.

There was some talk of discharging him from the Legion, that he might be placed in a civilian asylum. But there was the adjustment of pension to be considered. Moreover, Maufler did not wish to leave, and when he passed before the medical board he answered questions correctly, reacted to all tests like a perfectly sane man.

"Must be kept under observation," the board decided.

HE WAS allowed to remain at the hospital pending developments. As his idleness was demoralizing to others, he was permitted to take a job in town, in a civilian firm. Thus he earned enough money to drink when he cared to. With room, board, clothing and medical attention assured by the government, four hundred francs a month meant luxuries.

He was wary, and would have an absent minded spell during business hours from time to time, so that his employer might truthfully report:

"He freezes in one spot, like a mechanical toy when the spring runs down. I shake him a bit, and he gets to work. I don't mind it, of course, but I see where it would be bothersome in a military outfit."

This might have lasted for years, had Morocco not called for replacements. The Algerian regiment of Legion Infantry, which is a sort of training unit, was asked to supply them. The Saida battalion was ordered to have three hundred men ready to entrain for Oudjda within a week.

Active service is the reward of the good Legionnaire. He gives many reasons for this, such as higher pay, decorations, opportunities for rapid promotion. But the principal reason is the obvious fact that the Legionnaire is necessarily a born nomad, who loves change, travel and excitement. Having enlisted to fight, fighting seems the sole justification of his existence. All sought to be placed on the list of those departing; sick men left their cots and reported at the barracks. Discipline improved overnight; the cafés lost money.

Maufler did not want to work, but he wanted to fight. He decided to announce his cure, and leave for Morocco. But he realized that there was small chance of his being accepted unless he went about it cleverly.

He lost hope when he learned that Captain Parquier would command the detachment. Eight years before, he had served under him in the Sahara and knew that he was not deceived by ordinary tricks of Legionnaires.

Parquier was a large, taciturn man of thirty-six, who had been with the corps nineteen years. He knew nothing, thought nothing but Legion. He took excellent care of his men, watched over their comfort, their health, backed them to the limit against civilians and police. A Legionnaire was always right, even when wrong, as Parquier was claimed to have stated on one occasion. No officer could be said to be braver. Others had achieved more picturesque records, single deeds of brilliant courage, but no one surpassed his average of success and devotion.

Nevertheless he was not deemed an ideal chief. He was hard to live with, impossible to please entirely. His very concern for his men was an annoyance to them. He halted Legionnaires in the street to question them. Moreover, he had gathered a number of unreasoned prejudices during his career. He was a partisan of the discarded knapsack; he scorned a sergeant who wore civilian garments off duty, even if regulations allowed married noncoms to do it. He was for abolishing the use of automatic weapons in colonial warfare, stating that the automatic rifle wasted ammunition in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, that the automatic pistol was an undependable toy.

What was much worse, Captain Parquier was never wrong. He never altered a decision he uttered. Never, so far as any one knew, had he shaded a judgment, admitted a mistake. Twice he had accepted transfers rather than repudiate obviously arbitrary orders.

Maufler knew these peculiarities. He had heard gossip in the past to the effect that lieutenants and sergeants, assigned to his company, learned certain fashions of presenting a problem to him for decision. The trick was to remain vague until Parquier made a first answer, then to continue with such arguments as were impossible to refute, without admitting haste or error.

The Legionnaire asked the surgeon for a certificate of physical fitness, which he obtained easily. Then he went to see Sergeant Neuhaus, a stolid, intelligent German, who was Parquier's scribe at the time.

"I want my name on that list, Sergeant."

"Listen, I don't put men on that list. It's handed to me by the battalion office. You know that as well as I do."

"I want my name on—"

"Go to the devil."

"You refuse my request, Sergeant?"

"Didn't I tell you the list was given to me; that—"

Maufler withdrew hastily, doubled to the captain's office across the barracks yard. At the sound of his steps, the captain turned from the table on which he

was writing, rose, bareheaded, belt unbuckled, frowning.

"What now? Eh—I have seen you. Can't be mistaken."

"Maufler, Ferdinand. Fourth of the First of the First, Gerryville, eight years ago. My Captain has a splendid memory, if I may be allowed to say it."

"Yes, yes—never forget a face. Maufler, eh? Don't forget names, either. Good day, my friend. What can I do for you?"

"Sergeant Neuhaus said you wouldn't take me to Morocco, Captain."

"Are you on the list?"

"Captain—" Maufler dodged the question— "I've been in the Legion thirteen years and three months, awarded the Military Medal, the War Cross. I got back a few months ago from two years in the Tonkin. My convalescence is ended. I have seen no active service in four years. Don't you think I have a right to go, Captain?"

"You have, my friend."

"But Sergeant Neuhaus says—"

"Get me Neuhaus, somebody."

Neuhaus came at the double, halted, clicked his heels, saluted. He cast an angry, worried glance toward Maufler, who concealed a smile just a bit too late. The sergeant flushed, grew stubborn.

"Yes, I told him you wouldn't take him, Captain. He is not on the list, has no right to be. He is under observation, is either mad or a faker. He has no right to—"

"A minute—" Parquier lifted a finger with dangerous calm. "A small, a brief minute, Sergeant! I told him he had a right to go. You tell me he has no right to go. Who is right, I wonder?"

"That isn't the question, Captain. This chap—"

"One doesn't say 'chap'; one says 'Legionnaire'. Further, what isn't the question? It doesn't matter who is right? You think it unimportant that I—"

"The medical records can be consulted, Captain, and—"

"Damn the medical records, Sergeant. He goes."

"The colonel—" began the sergeant.

"You, Sergeant, may not be interested in what I have to say. Oddly enough, the colonel considers my wishes. You have an order."

"He's sick, Captain."

"Admit he doesn't look it, Sergeant."

Neuhaus reddened, faltered. He knew he was right, knew that he had been tricked in some manner. He could not discern just how. According to regulations, Maufler needed a mental examination. He spoke resolutely.

"This Legionnaire has suffered Tonkinese sunstroke, Captain!"

"Is that true, Maufler?" Parquier asked, looking at the private with new interest.

"Yes, Captain," Maufler admitted, discouraged.

"So have I," Parquier declared placidly. "Do I seem to be the worse for it now, Sergeant? Come, this is all nonsense. Do as I ordered. Dismissed."

MAUFLER behaved well during the following months. With the Tadla Mobile Group, the company under Parquier marched through the passes of the Middle Atlas to operate in the Midelt region. The column had a hard assignment, devoid of glory, yet as dangerous as more glamorous undertakings.

It was guerrilla fighting, ambush and counter-ambush, small skirmishes which bled a battalion of a man here, two, three elsewhere. Captain Parquier swore, fussed, enjoyed himself tremendously. His favorite theories on automatic weapons appeared justified. By the time an automatic rifle went into action in earnest, the enemy had discharged their carbines and were gone, leaving dead and wounded soldiers on the field.

Maufler obtained charge of a shock group specializing in counter-ambush. He was no longer apathetic and lazy. After six weeks in the open, he was a corporal, twice cited, and slated to become a sergeant when the campaign was over. This did not move him to

great dreams for the future. He had been made a corporal four times, a sergeant once. Rash answers, independence of character and a fondness for the divine bottle had brought him down to the ranks again as soon as he was sent back to roofed quarters.

"Pretty smart for a madman," Parquier would remark to Sergeant Neuhaus, with a smile of sheer conceit. "You're a bright lad! If I had listened to you, he'd be back in Saida."

"Wait until he plays you a tune of his composition," thought Neuhaus, while he answered aloud, "You were right, Captain."

"I am right sometimes, Neuhaus."

Some of the episodes of the campaign will be remembered long. Parquier acted upon his slightest hunch; the men accepted his whims, for he was sincere and courageous. They became convinced, almost as much as he was, that he could not err. On one occasion, the captain backed his judgment of terrain against maps, photographs taken from planes, staff officers' advice. The men followed him without grumbling, endured fatigue and thirst. When, after hours of marching and counter-marching, the company reached the spot assigned, Parquier addressed his lieutenant with a grin of triumph.

"Well, we got here! I was right."

"You were right, Captain."

With the end of good weather, the rebel tribes decided that they had had sufficient sport for a year. The snow would start to fall on the hills soon, forage would be hard to find for herds and flocks. The majority were married men with families, and life could not be all play. Therefore, they sent a delegation to greet the general commanding the Mobile Group. Terms were discussed, a black bull was offered in sacrifice in an impressive ceremony.

The Legionnaires saw that the campaign was over. Hostilities would not start again until the middle of Spring. Meanwhile, the Legion must construct blockhouses, make roads, man watchtowers. The new men enjoyed the prospect, but the old soldiers, who knew the monotonous watches, the dreary days, wood and water fatigues, looked enviously toward the battalions of other corps, who were to go north to the cities of the plains—Meknes, Fez, Guerçif.

Parquier was joyous. His company, recently come from Algeria, was of course among those to garrison the outposts. The captain was at home anywhere when surrounded by Legionnaires. He would be king of all he surveyed, able to bring his men to perfect physical condition in the bracing Winter air of the mountains. Those who had served under him in Morocco before were less elated.

"You'll see—snow makes him crazy. He'll have everybody out in the yard for gymnastics, stripped to the waist. He says it makes you healthy, that it's done in sanatoriums of Switzerland, that people pay thousands of francs to do it, while we get it for nothing. There are always a few fools to play up to him and rub snow down your back, into your pants. Then he fusses with the diet—forbids this and orders that. By the time you've been in an outpost with him three weeks, you'd go to jail for three years to avoid another fortnight."

Maufler listened with increasing dread. That was not the proper existence for a man of his years. He needed a large city in the Winter, bars where one had a chance to pick up cash playing cards. Saida would have been ideal, but it was impossible. Meknes would have to do. They had a superb hospital there, and he knew Marinette, who owned a large café. They had been sweethearts once, when she had come to Ain-Seffra as a serving girl, and, while both were beyond sentimentality now, enough had lingered to assure him credit.

He thumped his booklet thoughtfully. The mention which had served him so well was unscratched: "Must be kept under observation." He was pressed for time, as the bulk of the column was to leave for Meknes within forty-eight

hours. There was an element of risk in his plan; but who dared nothing achieved nothing.

In the middle of the night a shot awoke the camp. Although a truce had been signed, an attack was not impossible. A stentorian voice resounded:

"To arms, to arms! The enemy!"

Half dressed men tumbled into the shallow trenches dug to protect the encampment. A nervous man fired, the contagion spread, and nearly three thousand rifles were in action. Flares went up, revealed the surroundings deserted, although enough lead had been poured into the slopes to wipe out a regiment. Angry officers circulated, pushed and shouted, urged the men to get back to their tents.

The general naturally felt somewhat ridiculous because of the hysterical fusillade. He was aware that the natives must be informed that it had been causeless. He ordered an investigation.

Maufler confessed.

Brought before an officers' council, he declared that he had felt a hand stroking his face, that some one very near had gnashed his teeth. He had grasped his rifle and fired, shouted before realizing that he was the victim of an illusion.

"An illusion, Corporal?" a staff major asked severely.

"I could pretend it was real, Major. But I am an old soldier who understands the gravity of his fault. It was very dark, my nerves snapped. I am ready to suffer punishment."

The officers looked at him, at the medals lining his chest. This man was not a coward; a coward would have concealed his shame with lies. Maufler appeared ashamed, repentant.

"Started with a feeling of oppression in your chest?" a medical officer asked. "Then the anguish grew until it was a relief to scream?"

"Yes, *Monsieur le Major.*"

"Shock of some sort. Have you had such symptoms before?"

Maufler produced his booklet, under Parquier's sarcastic glance.

"What did I tell you?" the doctor triumphed. "Tonkinese sunstroke. Record as long as your arm—all Algerian hospitals."

"The effects of sunstroke do not last forever," Parquier volunteered.

"There's always some trace. Shows in various ways—but shows. This man may become dangerous in an outpost, for one of his fits might take a violent turn. Such cases nurture imaginary grievances against the most innocent persons. He must be kept under observation."

"He's a faker," the captain said.

"I am merely a medical officer—" the doctor smiled.

"Precisely," Parquier snapped.

There was a moment of silence. The doctor dodged the quarrel. A glance toward the rest informed them that he believed sunstroke affected others than mere privates and corporals. Over Parquier's protests, Corporal Maufler was invalided to Meknes, leaving a company which would fight little and work much.

HOSPITAL LOUIS at Meknes proved a paradise. No one bothered about a single man there; once he had convinced doctors that he was not violent, Maufler was allowed to do very much as he pleased. When nurses and orderlies discovered that reporting his absence merely caused another mark on his record—the Legionnaire was kept under observation—they dropped him. He remained one, two, three days in town, and nothing was said.

Although Marinette granted him credit, he ran short of cash, for there were other expenses. He procured a civilian suit, hired himself to a man who owned a taxicab service. Weeks passed, and he grew bolder and bolder. Then one afternoon he reported to the hospital for medical tests in his taxi.

When he had dressed, he went out and found the doctor who had examined him seated in his cab. The officer was a kindly man, but he had stated before

several younger pupils that Maufler was a typical case, and could not concentrate for five minutes on any task. Driving a motor car through the native quarter of Meknes requires a certain concentration.

For a week Maufler hoped that he had not been identified. But at the next visit he was declared healthy, sound mentally.

"Fit for duty—Maufler, Ferdinand, Corporal."

Maufler was sent to the barracks, and behaved. He did not dare try any tricks for a time. Then two incidents allowed him to resume his game. The doctor who knew of him was sent to Casablanca, and the company under Parquier returned from the hills, to recuperate for the Summer campaign. Maufler was assigned to it once more. The captain nodded when he reported.

"Cured? Good, very good. We'll give you building up exercises, my friend."

His tone was ominous, and Maufler was worried. He might have been satisfied to let well enough alone; but for nearly two years, since his departure from the Tonkin, he had avoided work and drill. His next stunt must be new, and could not be tried within the company. An outside scandal was needed. The captain would not believe him, but the new doctors might.

For a fortnight, he discharged his duties perfectly. He was in charge of a detail digging a drain near the military camp. One afternoon he grasped the handles of a wheelbarrow, and left for town in his undershirt. He attracted attention, but it was not until late that evening that a patrol picked him up. The sergeant, after smelling his breath, decided he was a case for the hospital. The doctor read his booklet, and placed him under observation.

Maufler slept in a clean cot and was contented. This, he thought, was good for another three months. After that, there was small chance that he would be assigned to Parquier's company. But he was startled the next morning when Sergeant Neuhaus came to fetch him.

"The doctor said—" he protested.

"Parquier saw him, and says that if he can't cure you in twenty-four hours you'll be sent back. Listen, I have no use for you. You're a slob and a faker. But I am a human being, and feel pity. Watch yourself: Parquier's after you."

"Thanks," Maufler said with sincere gratitude.

He felt that he had come to the end of his rope.

The captain closed the door to his office, shut the windows. Then he circled three times around Maufler, halted before him, stared into his eyes for a long minute—in silence.

"I don't want a word out of you, Maufler. You'll listen, this time. I said you were a faker. I am right. To start with, your chevrons pop off. I'll see to that. You're a second class Legionnaire this minute. Further, I shall hold the sergeants responsible if you roam, give them permission to restrain you by force. You are a madman, by your own admission, and if they use a bit of force in the right spots, no one will blame them. Understand? You may answer."

"Yes, Captain."

"No leave for town until further notice. At the first wrong move, I put you down for thirty days in prison. If you argue, say a single word, I'll double that. I'll motivate the punishments so that the colonel can't help signing them. The third time, I'll get you ninety days and officers' council. That means the Disciplinary Company. Don't hope to see medical asses. I'll attend to that, too. Understood?"

"Yes, Captain."

"You were cited during the campaign. You shall receive your cross at the next review. I have the right to take your chevrons from you, but I consider that your citations are your own. No one gave them to you. You won them. Dismissed."

Neuhaus had waited outside.

"Well, smart guy?"

"I'm through all right. He's too tough for me."

"Reduced to the ranks, I suppose?"

"Sure. But my citations stick."

"Fine—" Neuhaus laughed with deep irony. "Big honor—Fleuriot will pin them on us."

"Fleuriot?" Maufler was startled.

"Yes, minister for colonies. Due here next week. We have to put on a show for the swine."

MAUFLER was chaffed for two or three days for losing to Parquier. Then the preparations for the ceremonies to honor Minister Fleuriot absorbed every one. New uniforms were issued, there was a rage for cleanliness.

Not that Fleuriot was popular. It was common knowledge that he had betrayed every cause he had pledged himself to defend. He was a chameleon of politics. Gifted with phenomenal poise, able to talk for hours without telling the truth, yet never uttering a lie, he had dodged in and out of parties and conflicting allegiances with superb skill. Sent to the Chambers from a small southern city to represent socialists, he had turned from red to pink, from pink to rose, and now was a conspicuous nationalist.

In his early years in politics, he had exhibited the calloused palms of a mechanic to the crowd as proof of his kinship with the poorest. When it became necessary to his advancement, he supported the very policies he had fought. Meanwhile, he had acquired a large fortune, for he sold appointments, accepted commissions on government deals. Yet when attacked by his opponents in the Chambers, he always contrived to talk his way out of all trouble.

On the appointed day the battalions were massed for his inspection. At a signal, the Legionnaires presented arms in a brief shudder of steel, their companies became motionless walls under the ardent sun, walls crested by the red of képis, banded by the blue of sashes at the middle. There was a flashing of brass instruments, the bands played the "Marseillaise".

Fleuriot alighted from a glittering automobile, came forward with his secretaries, their friends, hangers-on, escorted by officers in parade uniforms. He passed before the troops and, as he inspected them, they took stock of him.

He was tall, obese. A big, pink nose sprouted above a yellow mustache. His eyes were small, very blue, deeply set, and held a glimmer of craftiness. He had been a powerful man at one time, but his body sagged at the shoulders, bulged the black frockcoat at the waist. His pasty face oozed sweat as he walked slowly along the front of the battalions.

"Fine men, splendid men," he said repeatedly.

But he was bored, and evidently wished to cut the review short. The lean, long limbed general who conducted him hid a smile under his clipped mustache, did not spare him a yard. Fleuriot puffed, wiped his face. Then, at last, he was led to the center of the field.

Drums, bugles and fifes picked up the "March of the Foreign Legion", and the battalion, which had been with the Tadla Group, swung forward. The sounds seemed to swell and surge from everywhere at once, to dilate the heated air, to dance and pound through the red dust. A brief order, the men halted. Another, they presented arms. The band was still.

"Patriotism—heroism—valor—" the men caught an occasional word of Fleuriot's speech. "Sacrifice—national—duty—France—salute your heroic dead —*Vive la Légion.*"

Citations were read, preluded and concluded with bursts of music from the bands. As his name was called, each man to be decorated stepped forward, stood at attention. There were two rows—one principally composed of officers, for the Legion of Honor awards; the other for lesser decorations.

Maufler went forward when his cita-

tion was read. Four paces before him was the broad back of Captain Parquier. To his left was Sergeant Neuhaus, who was to receive a medal earned for five years. To his right a young German private panted audibly with excitement.

The officers saluted with the sword, received the accolade. Then the cabinet minister reached the second row, distributed handshakes and casual compliments.

"Legionnaire Maufler!"

Maufler stood before the minister. Their eyes met as Fleuriot fastened the new colonial cross on the spot left free for it. Then the official offered his sweaty hand. For some reason he seemed more tired, his voice grew hoarse.

"I compliment you. You're a brave fellow, Legionnaire—Legionnaire—"

"Maufler, Ferdinand," the soldier prompted.

"Legionnaire Maufler—a brave fellow —you're a—"

Fleuriot should have passed on, but he seemed rooted to the spot, stammered, could not find the right words. Suddenly his voice died out. And in the silence, Maufler's voice rose, sharp, resounding.

"That's all right, Auguste! Thanks a lot!"

The cabinet minister started, nodded, and went on to the next man. Those escorting him fought against laughter. This was a typical Legionnaire's stunt. Maufler saw his captain turn slightly, caught his glance over one shoulder. His mind was not wholly at ease after that.

"You asked for it," Captain Parquier said an hour later, when Maufler reported at his office as ordered. "You wanted a laugh, and you got one. I promised you thirty days for the next fault, and you have them. Don't explain: I warned you that I'd double it at the first protest." The officer circled Maufler, faced him again. "Sunstroke, eh? I'll show you! Mad? Thirty days, my lad, thirty days! Go get into fatigue uniform, report to Sergeant Neuhaus at the prison. And remember that I am right—sometimes. Dismissed."

Neuhaus ushered Maufler into a cell fifteen minutes later. The Legionnaire sank on the sloping plank serving as a bed, and laughed. The sergeant stared at him, astonished. Although he was convinced that Maufler was a faker, the hysterical, maniacal ring in the laughter worried him.

"Pull yourself together," he said gruffly. "You deserved that ten times over."

"The captain wants no explanation. He's always right—" Maufler strove for control. "That's what's funny, Sergeant! He thinks I was playing crazy! I get away with everything for two years, then I get jugged for calling Fleuriot by his first name!"

"That's reason enough."

"Reason enough?" Maufler laughed louder. "Do you realize that was the sanest thing I've done in years? Know who Fleuriot happens to be?"

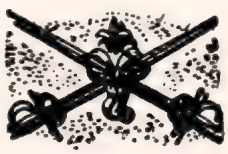
"The minister of colonies!"

"And my own brother!"

Neuhaus looked at the Legionnaire for awhile in silence. Maufler, he felt, was sincere. Doubt entered his mind. Without adding another word, he locked the door and left the building. The laughter could be heard from the yard.

"What's the matter with that guy?" the sentry asked.

"Him?" Neuhaus pushed back his képi, scratched his head. "I think the captain's got him wrong. He's crazy. Tonkinese sunstroke, you know!"



Ballade to the Lost Friends

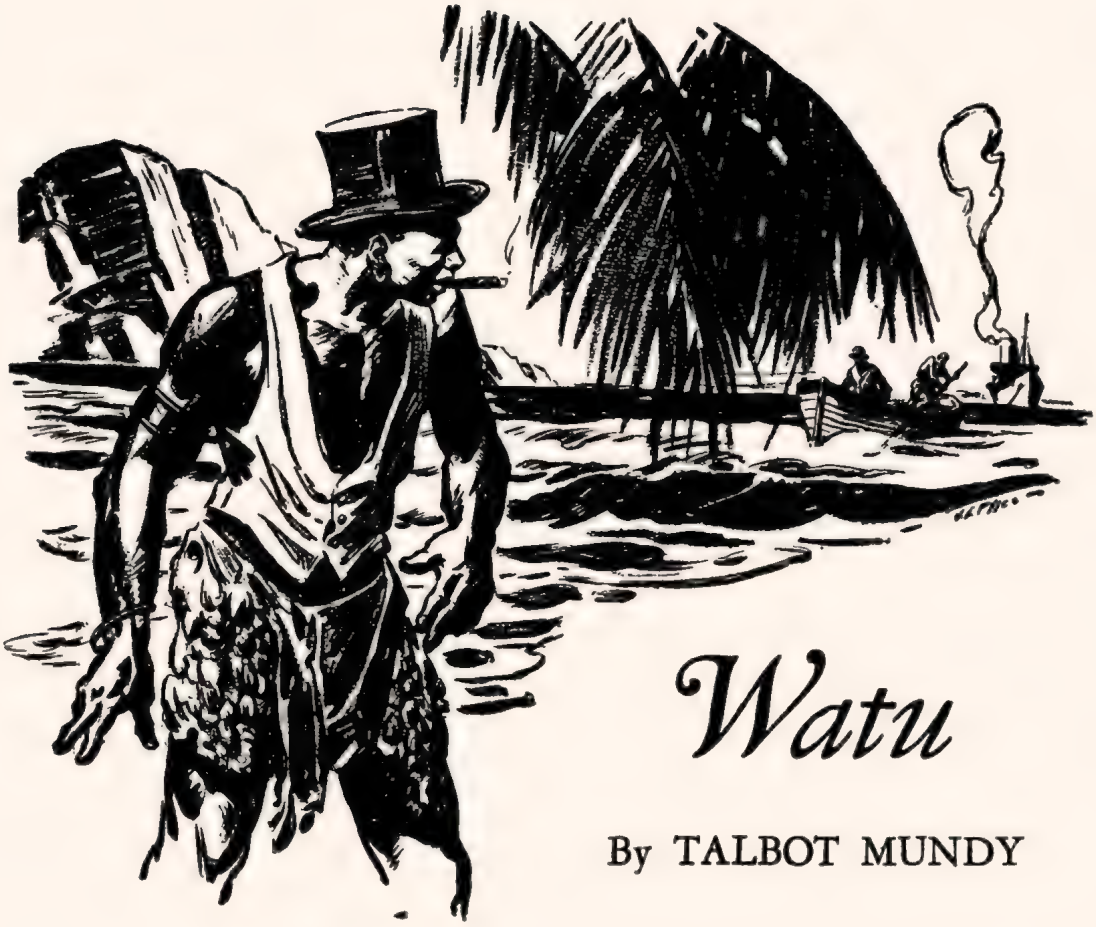
By BERT COOKSLEY

FROM wharf and riverhead and key,
From drydock, chandler yard and bay,
The iron rovers put to sea,
Their deep lunged whistles loud at play,
Their great hulls trembling on the way.
And proud they be of stack and rail—
But Lord! my heart is aching gray
To see a schooner's reach of sail!

Aye, splendid and rich these great ones be,
Strong these ships of a newer day,
Great be their tricks and wizardry,
However fierce the storm kings bray—
But Lord! my heart is sore to say
The old loved names of *Hawk* and *Grail,*
To work with hawser, block and stay
Beneath a schooner's stretch of sail!

The pier bands sing out gallantly,
The rails are crowded, decks are gay;
The huge bow eases gently free
And heads out for the Long Away—
But Lord! my ears are tuned for aye
To chanteys bellowed down the gale,
To hard wind whipping bitter spray
Upon a schooner's haul of sail!

Old friends! What head has grown too gray,
What sea-tried heart and throat too pale
To throb when down an emerald bay
A schooner lifts her cloud of sail!



Watu

By TALBOT MUNDY

Random Reminiscences of Africa

THEY call themselves Watu—the people; and verily they are the people, no matter what any one else is. Far and away more important and more interesting than the white man and his railways, or even than the animals that wander over veld and jungle, are the African natives. Ignorant they are; incapable of governing themselves they may be; nevertheless they are Africa. Whoever loves Africa, and nearly all men do who have ever lived there, remembers its exasperating and amusing natives with affection, bearing no grudge against them for the tremendous demands they sometimes make on patience. It is easy to forget their many faults. Their virtues never fade from memory.

The best dressed person I ever saw was in Zanzibar. He was six feet tall and as black as polished ebony, with a row of flashing white teeth; and his entire wardrobe consisted of a second hand top hat, a white silk evening dress waistcoat, a bamboo walking stick and a cigar. They fitted him; so did his smile, which urged the whole wide world to look on and admire his good taste. He had evidently spent his last coin on the finery, because when I signaled to him from one of the rowboats that carry passengers from big ships anchored in the roadstead, he instantly stripped and waded through the surf to carry me to dry land. Hav-

ing thus earned thirty cents or so, he readorned himself and, being once again in the capitalist class, departed to wherever it is in Zanzibar that Galla negroes get their money's worth.

If they have any sense of economy, in the ordinary meaning of the word, it is latent. Money is as much a mystery to them as it must be to the white lambs who get themselves so regularly shorn of all they have by stock exchanges in the civilized parts of the world. They simply don't know what it means, except that some government makes it, for reasons unknown; that it will buy things; and that whoever is not a member of the privileged ruling classes has to work to get it, or else steal it—and stealing is not their besetting sin, except among a few degenerate tribes who practise theft as a profession.

As recently as 1903 there was no money at all throughout large tracts of Africa. All trade was conducted by barter; and as the fashion in glass beads would change from month to month, and would vary from village to village, it was a very risky business to fit out a safari with trade goods and go buying ivory or hides.

The really smart trader would establish a headquarters, whence he would send presents, of the beads of which he had the largest stock, to the headwives of all the local chiefs, thus making all the other women jealous and creating a demand. But he would be badly out of luck if some other trader, working perhaps from fifty miles away, created a demand for beads of a different size or color. The man with the beads of the latest style, or blankets of the latest pattern, was the one who did all the business.

But barter was at any rate easy to understand. Money, when it was introduced at last, was an occult mystery—and still is, although it has entirely replaced barter. In order to introduce money into outlying districts, the Government of British East Africa, as the Province of Kenya was called in those days, imposed a hut tax of one dollar per hut per annum on every hut throughout the country. Then, to make it possible to pay the tax in coin, the natives were offered work at such simple jobs as roadmaking and the chiefs were commanded to spread the good news.

Men who did not even know what work was, and who had no notion what a road was good for, turned up in hundreds and went through the motions of learning to work, for a wage of one dollar per month per man. At the end of the month they were paid, in silver coin. Then, before they could do anything unwise with the money, an official collected the dollar hut tax. They were out exactly one month's rations, which their wives had brought to them day after day from the home village, and to say that they were mystified is to state it extremely mildly.

However, there was still another mystery: There were lots of new stores, run by Goanese and Indians, with very tempting blankets and such luxuries as matches on display; and, barter being frowned on, it was discovered that by staying on and working for another month or two a man might earn the wherewithal to buy the things he craved. It was in that way, little by little, that brass wire, beads and calico gave place to coin as a means of exchange.

However, money remained a mystery. I had a headman named Ngozi, who discovered that by filling out and signing a check on the Bank of India I could get what money I might need from whichever Indian trader happened to be sending a remittance to the Coast. So he took counsel with a native of Uganda, who had learned to write after a fashion and had adopted the more or less civilized name of Moses. Ngozi watched his chance and took my checkbook; Moses spoiled a dozen checks but drew one finally for the equivalent of thirty dollars—probably the largest sum that he could think of—signed my name to it, with the word mister in front of the signature, and the two of them took the

astonishing thing to an Indian store, where, to crown astonishment, the Indian cashed it.

Four weeks later, when the check had come back from Mombasa dishonored and the outraged Indian sent a piteous appeal to me by runner, it cost me a march of a hundred miles and a lot of subsequent delay and argument to keep Ngozi out of prison.

He had spent his half of the money on a heifer, which the Indian agreed to accept at half price, but I had to make good the balance because Moses had vanished. Ngozi explained that he needed the heifer for matrimonial reasons, as the price of a wife was two heifers and he expected to be able to save the price of the second one out of his wages. He was sorry he and Moses had spoiled my checkbook, but he could not for the life of him see why the check was no good or why the money had to be returned.

He was much too good a headman to be fired for a mistake in economics, so I made a bargain with him: if he would serve me faithfully for one whole year I would make him a present of two heifers by way of bonus. That committed me, in a way, to be best man at Ngozi's wedding, which shall be described later on.

The African native's idea of justice is peculiar, and intensely personal. His ideals are also personal. He will take an interest in you, and serve you loyally according to his lights—and they are good lights in their way—if you in return will take an interest in him. He expects punishment; he will do things deserving punishment in order to test your sense of justice; and if he finds you unjust he will fail you as inevitably as an awkward moment comes. His punishments, too, must be personal. I have often given a delinquent native his choice of a fine or a beating, and I have never known one not to prefer the beating; but you must beat him without malice, and for an offense of which he knows he is guilty, otherwise he will resent it and take toll of you in some way later on.

He detests you if you deduct a few cents from his pay, no matter what good reason you may think you have for doing it. It is difficult enough for him to understand—in fact he never quite does understand—that only one month has twenty-eight days, while others have thirty, and some thirty-one. When he signs on for a month's work he has already spent the money in his own mind; he has possibly even actually spent it in advance, on credit, at some Indian's store.

From his point of view you have promised him a full month's pay, and it is up to you to get a month's work out of him if you can—and you can do that fairly easily if he likes you; if he doesn't like you, he will make it extremely difficult. But no matter how much loafing he puts in, or how many tools he breaks, he expects his wage in full on pay day, and he considers you are not a decent white man if you don't keep promises.

A beating for delinquency is fair. A fine is unfair. On the other hand, if you do beat him, that must be the end of it; no holding the offense against him afterward. Once he has paid the penalty, the delinquency, whatever it was, must be considered canceled and the slate clean. He will even test you, to make sure that is your attitude; and if so, he will not only bear no grudge, but will pass the word all over the countryside that you are a just man. All up and down the length of Africa, if you expect to have dealings with natives, that is the only kind of reputation worth a moment's effort to acquire. Be firm; be drastic if you will; but always be just, or you will find your reputation travels in advance of you and raises all sorts of unexpected trouble.

I KNEW a Greek named George Coutlass, who eventually died in prison in German East Africa. His career outside of prison was prolonged by nothing else than his acute understanding of the native sense of justice. He had very little money, but he had a faithful following

of thirty Nyamwezi porters, whom he regularly paid in full when payday came around. However, then he sat down with them by the camp-fire and won the money back from them at any game of chance they fancied; and it was not until they actually caught him in the act of cheating that they turned on him at last and denounced him to the German authorities. Even so, when he had been sentenced to a term in prison, they so missed his "justice" and his games of "chance" that they went in a group to the German judge and begged for his release.

The most Solomon-like judgment that I ever witnessed was delivered by a man named Hughes, a British sergeant-instructor, whose impossible task was to make good riflemen of Kavirondo police recruits. Like every other servant of the government in those short handed and perplexing days, he was given dozens of extra jobs to do, and on one occasion he was sent to a place called Kapsabit, in the Nandi highlands, where at that time there was no permanent European official; but a half company of police were stationed under the command of a Sudanese sergeant-major. Hughes had been up there for several weeks when I arrived on a tour of inspection, and he greeted me with the news that he was about to hold court, but that he had postponed the trial until the following morning when he saw my camp equipment in the distance, since I was his superior officer and might prefer to do the job myself.

From a distance of more than a hundred and fifty miles, two groups of natives had come to lay a hot dispute before a white judge for impartial decision. In those days Kapsabit was about the northern limit of actual British occupation, and these people came from a district that was certainly not yet subject to British law; their own chiefs were the proper arbiters. However, the principals themselves were minor chiefs, and they were thoroughly determined not to submit to a decision by any one of their own race, which would probably be repudiated by the loser and thus lead to bloodshed. Each side had brought at least twenty witnesses, along with dozens of acquaintances, familiars and hangers-on; and they had brought a court fee with them in the form of two fat cattle. They—the people—wanted justice; no more, no less.

Having no jurisdiction, and consequently no precedent, I waived both in favor of Hughes, who selected a clearing amid high, feathery juniper trees, and there, the following morning, I sat down beside him merely as spectator. The first difficulty was to get an interpreter, since neither side trusted the man they had brought, and neither Hughes nor I knew a word of the language of the district from which the litigants came.

After a long delay we found two, one to translate into Nandi, and the other from Nandi into Swahili. Then court was called to order by Ismail, the Sudanese sergeant-major, acting as master-at-arms with a long whip in his hand, to make sure that not too many people tried to speak at once. The litigants sat on the ground in front of our two chairs, with the interpreters beside them to the right and left; behind them were the witnesses in a semicircle; behind those again, a double semicircle of spectators backed by Ismail's uniformed policemen; and surrounding us were the trunks of the junipers, with a view between them of miles of waving treetops.

The interpreting was awful and I never entirely gathered what the case was all about; and I don't believe Hughes did either, although he said he did. But the oratory was amazing, and each witness apparently made up his facts as he went along and flatly contradicted all the others. The case hinged on a woman, whose guilt of almost every imaginable crime was the only point on which every one was in agreement; she was the daughter of the defendant and the wife of the complainant, but had run away with a third man, who was not present, and had been slain by a fourth, who in turn had been speared by the angry abductor.

The problem appeared to be: Who owned the offspring of the cows, which the husband had originally paid to the father as the price of the woman? It was conceded by both sides that cows had changed ownership to ratify the marriage and make it binding, but there was a dispute as to how many cows. The father said he had returned two heifers to the husband, and he claimed that was sufficient. On the other hand, the husband claimed that he had originally paid five fully grown cows, each of which had subsequently given birth to calves, and those in turn to more calves, which again had calves, and so on. He demanded all the calves, as well as the original five cows, which had died some time ago; and he claimed that even if two heifers had been returned to him, which, nevertheless, he denied, they were not such good ones as the original five he had paid.

Furthermore, he asked for damages against his father-in-law, whom he accused of having encouraged the woman to elope with her abductor; and he added an additional, amazing claim for five cows extra, on the ground that his father-in-law had deprived him of his just revenge by sending some one else to kill the woman.

The abductor was not in court, but there were other complications that concerned him and that were much too intricate to be unraveled in the time at our disposal. Hughes tried to confine the arguments to the main issue, and the interpreters worked with the fury of shyster lawyers in a contingency fee ambulance case, each taking opposite sides.

It was evening before the last witness had been heard and Hughes delivered judgment, after filling his pipe with a jerk of his thumb and lighting it with a firebrand. He asked for Ismail's *kiboko* —a long whip made of undressed hippo-hide—and gave that to the claimant. Then he ordered the defendant to lie face downward on the grass.

"I sentence him," he said, "to fifty lashes. Lay 'em on good."

Delighted, the claimant laid on with a vengeance; he worked off six months' indignation and all the bitterness that an unfaithful woman can stir in a savage's system, Hughes marking each blow with a scratch on the ground and taking back the whip when he had counted fifty and the defendant, who had endured the thrashing stoically, scrambled to his feet. Then Hughes turned to the interpreter—

"Ask him, is he satisfied?"

"He says yes."

Hughes handed the whip to the defendant.

"Then tell him it's the other man's turn now. Tell him to lie down and take fifty himself."

The defendant was the taller and stronger man, but he had been weakened enough by the punishment to balance matters fairly evenly. With grim contentment he gave back stroke for stroke and the spectators all grunted approval.

"Now shake hands. Are they satisfied? Are they friends now?"

Both said they were satisfied, and they grinned at each other to prove it. The spectators, and witnesses too, were well pleased, since a dispute had been settled that might otherwise have caused an almost endless chain of murders. But the end was not yet. The interpreters had grossly violated all the rules of justice by interpreting to suit their own views, with the obvious expectation of being well rewarded by the winner.

So Hughes in person gave each of them twenty-five lashes. Then he ordered the court fees killed and a barbecue served. When morning came, after a night of feasting and talk by bonfire light, two groups of thoroughly contented litigants set out homeward in one party, to spread Hughes' name all over the countryside as a perfect paragon of wisdom and impartial justice.

Women are at the bottom of nine-tenths of the disputes between native and native. Watu, the people, are conservative, and they cherish their ancient customs, even though conditions have entirely changed and this generation has forgotten the day when brides were ac-

tually carried off by raiding parties and compensation, in the form of cattle, was paid afterward for the sake of inter-tribal peace. They still go through the motions. The minimum price of a woman is still two heifers. And they still dislike to hand the heifers over until ceremonial warfare has been well waged.

THE ONLY time I ever knew my headman Ngozi to be punctual was when his year was up and he presented himself at my tent to claim the heifers I had promised him. He had kept his own part of the bargain, having served me—in his own way—faithfully; so I bought the heifers, for the equivalent of twenty dollars, and I am sure now as I was then that he pocketed at least five dollars' rakeoff on the deal. Not that Ngozi actually had any pockets; his costume by day was two yards of cotton loincloth, with a red trade blanket added when the evening grew chilly.

However, he now dolled up. Watu—the people—are instinctive communists, in that they believe in sharing your goods, though they are more particular about their own; they never consider it theft to help themselves to what they need out of your locker. Ngozi smeared himself from head to foot with oil that he had stolen from my stores and got two friends to polish him until he shone.

Then he begged from me the top half of an old pair of pajamas, studied his reflection for awhile in a pool of water, glanced at the grass thatched hut that he and his friends had been building not far from my tent, and announced himself ready. It had all along been understood that I was to witness the entire proceedings, but he was a tactful rogue and even intimated he would value my advice.

We walked together along the shore of Victoria Nyanza, where the tall, dense papyrus shut off the view of the lake on our left hand and there was only a narrow foot track between it and the high grass on our right; so that we came suddenly on a village water hole—a place whence an island of papyrus had been loosened and blown away by the wind to be a danger to navigation, and where crocodiles now lay in wait with the tips of their snouts on the water looking exactly like fragments of papyrus root. Ngozi showed himself and then retired into the tall grass, as excited as a leopard lurking to spring on its kill.

The women and girls from a village about a mile away had left their water jars on dry land and were bathing, making a lot of noise and splashing to scare away crocodiles. They had all caught sight of Ngozi, as he meant they should, and they understood perfectly why he was there. Was he not oiled and polished from head to foot?

The young ones all began to giggle and show off, the older women making cynical remarks about the worthlessness of men who wear no brass armlets. Ngozi was annoyed by the jibes; however, he whispered to me that only worthless women, who can't have children or till corn or cook it, notice a man's lack of ornaments. He continued to observe the younger women.

After awhile, being, as I said, tactful, he asked me which one I thought the best looking. Naturally, I picked out the prettiest—a girl about fourteen years old with a figure like an ebony goddess and a pertly intelligent face. But Ngozi shook his head.

"Too much tongue," he whispered. "All talk. No work."

So I chose another, who looked about a year older than the first one.

"Too old," he objected. "Not yet married? Some good reason for it."

He picked out the one I thought the ugliest of all. She had not even a good figure and her face was badly pock marked. She was thin, in a land where plumpness is regarded as a virtue, and she seemed more timid and less boisterous than any of the others.

"One-man woman. That one will know no goats are grazing in the corn. And when I want her, there she is."

That ended that day's business; we

went away. The following morning, however, we returned to the same water hole, and this time Ngozi brought along four companions, of whom one was my cook. To them he pointed out the young girl he had chosen. Then the makebelieve began. The men pretended to conceal themselves, but showed their heads quite openly between the clumps of tall grass. They pretended not to understand which girl it was that Ngozi had selected; and Ngozi pretended to grow frantic trying to point her out to them.

The older married women pretended they had no idea what was happening and all looked the other way, chanting a weird refrain over and over about watching for the crocodile that lurks near water holes. The younger women splashed and giggled, all pretending they did not know there were young men watching them. And the girl who had been chosen did the most pretending of them all; she drew apart from the others to make sure there should be no mistake, but she pretended she would not even wish to be chosen, supposing there was a man in the neighborhood, which she was quite sure there was not.

Even when Ngozi's four companions stalked out one by one at last and took a good long stare at her, she pretended not to see them—not even when the older women pretended to take alarm, and called to her, and they all took to their heels, leaving their water jars behind them, and went scampering away, stark naked, toward the village. That was that day's ceremony.

On the morning of the third day Ngozi tied his heifers to a stake outside the new hut, and once more we took the three-mile walk to the water hole. The women were splashing and laughing as usual, only this time they were rather more self-conscious; and, as we neared the water hole, we were aware of young men lurking in the long grass on the far side, armed with long shafts of spears from which the iron blades had been removed. Ngozi's companions also carried long sticks, but Ngozi himself had a regular spear with its blade in place, although he did not at any time go within fifty yards of the glorious battle that took place presently. A man is not required to fight at his own wedding—not in Kavirondo country.

Nobody paid any attention to me; they all pretended I was not there. The chosen bride looked frightened and self-conscious. However, she did her best to appear nonchalant and came out of the water presently to don her trousseau, which consisted of a bunch of green leaves of wild indigo tied to a goatskin thong around her waist. The moment she had donned that, Ngozi's four companions pounced on her.

Three of them seized her by the arms and hair, while the fourth prodded her with the butt of his headless spear, as if he were driving a recalcitrant heifer to market. She screamed and resisted. All the other women screamed. The young men lurking on the far side of the water hole emerged from hiding and, to an accompaniment of blood curdling yells, attacked the raiding party. Ngozi merely looked on, leaning on his spear.

One of the raiders dragged the struggling bride by the hair, she clinging to his arms for fear he might let go of her by accident. The remainder, prancing valiantly, thrashing and thrusting at empty air, beat off their twenty or thirty adversaries, who charged and retreated, charged and retreated and charged again, yelling to uphold the honor of their village. It was a magnificently successful raid and a glorious victory for the three heroes; Horatius and his two companions never held the bridge across the Tiber with half such all-conquering valor. And surely no ravished woman ever screamed so desperately, or struggled so picturesquely, or took such good care not to escape by accident.

When the raiding party reached open ground the valorous defenders of the bride lost hope and fled back to their village. Then Ngozi took his place some fifty yards behind the raiders, striding along with dignity, pretending that the

affair was no concern of his. But now the girl's mother arrived in hot pursuit—a respectable, matronly woman, with a thing like a black horse's tail tied on behind in proof of it. (The bride would don a tail like that tomorrow as her only garment.) She was followed by all the other married women of the village, and they joined in her lamentations but kept twenty or thirty yards behind her.

The mother's grief was terrible to witness. Tears streamed down her face. She beat her breast. She wailed, screamed, howled, gesticulated, and followed within two yards of Ngozi, who took no notice of her—none whatever. It was beneath his dignity to know that she existed; but it appeared to me, all the same, that he was listening to make sure she omitted not one customary imprecation. Ngozi was always particular about getting all that was rightly coming to him.

"Help! Help! They are stealing my beautiful daughter—my pearl of a daughter—my only daughter! Help! Help! They are beating her—they are taking her away! She will never eat my porridge any more! She will never bring me water any more! She will never again help me when I till the corn. She will never again help me when I grind the corn. She will never again bring me wood for the fire for the pot. Help! Help! You—give me back my daughter!"

All the way to Ngozi's new hut the old woman followed, lamenting and beating her breast. When they came to the hut the raiding party pitched the girl inside it and then drew off to a decent distance, leaning on their spears and grinning, while Ngozi took his stand with his back to the door of the hut. There the old woman went down on her knees to him; she stormed, begged, imprecated; she sang her daughter's praises and she boasted she would soon see Ngozi lying dead with fifty arrows in his stomach. But let him only give back her priceless daughter unharmed and all would be forgiven.

Ngozi enjoyed that drama for about twenty minutes; but then at last he condescended to speak to her—gruffly but with theatrical gusto—

"Old woman, take your cows."

As instantly as the sun shines when the rain clouds roll away she dried her tears. Without another word or gesture, she walked up to the heifers, untied them and drove them away in front of her toward the village, the other women singing the heifers' praises—only they called them big fat cows with heavy udders, that were sure to bring forth female calves each season and be a herd in no time.

That was all then. Ngozi was married.

The INVISIBLE SWORD

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

ALTHOUGH the residence of Mr. Norbert Thackery was set deep on a wide, densely shrubbed lot, Mr. Thackery seldom had to step farther than the front porch to pick up the evening paper. This evening he heard it thud there, and went out for it. He stood for a moment watching the carrier's car continue smoothly down Foothill Boulevard, as the man continued to toss papers in long arcs to other porches, set, like Thackery's, deep on wide, heavily slanted lots.

Thackery now reentered his living room, where he seated himself in comfort. It was his custom to glance over the more prominent headlines on the front page and then to lay the paper aside until after supper. He unfolded it and observed that the extreme left column referred to the visit of a French diplomat in Washington. Here, because Thackery was of an academic turn, he read all the sub-headings and about three inches down the text of the story.

He then glanced at the second lead from the left, which referred to the strained relations between Japan and China. Here Thackery again read some three inches down the column.

But when his eye shifted to the feature column, which was third from the left, Thackery winced, then skipped farther to the right. He was more than commonly sensitive. He instinctively shied from any and all of the more lurid sensations which modern journalists insisted upon foisting on his attention. He loathed having his news served seamy side up. Thus in this third column he saw only the top headline, which read:

CHOPPER IN NEW CHAPTER OF HORROR

Thackery was vaguely aware that each recent edition had devoted considerable space to some terrorizing criminal who had become known as the Chopper. Norbert Thackery did not know what this chopper had chopped, nor did he want to know. Such atrocities were well outside the pale of Thackery's well ordered life.

So his eyes shifted to the fourth feature column, which informed him that plans were well under way to make the coming Tournament of Roses a bigger and better tournament than ever. Reading about roses served to soothe the momentarily offended feelings of Mr. Thackery, who had quite a few roses of his own here on this wide, deep lawn at the foot of the Sierra Madre Mountains.

He next read a few paragraphs of the right front page column, which dealt with unemployment relief. It had been written by a by-liner whose theme was charity.

"Let all good citizens," read Thackery, "give aid where aid is needed."

Whereupon he laid the paper aside and went back to the kitchen. The kitchen was orderly, had been left so by Briggs, Thackery's combination cook and gardener, who was taking the week-end off. In the cupboard Briggs had left a cold roast, a salad and a plate of buns, which Thackery now carried to the dining room table.

After making coffee in the electric percolator, he sat down to eat. He was used to eating alone. Thackery was a childless widower, holder of the chair of history at a local college, and this Sabbatical year of vacation he was devoting to study in his home.

Now, just as his appetite was appeased, he heard a knock at the kitchen door. Thackery answered and was confronted by an individual who seemed to be very much on his uppers. He was a man about Thackery's age, patently a tramp. He was unshaven; he wore tattered overalls and a flat, greasy cap with a bent bill. Seen in the gloom of the back porch, he instantly appealed to the sympathies of Norbert Thackery.

"I'm sick and outa work," the man mumbled. "What about a bite to eat?"

"Come in," invited Thackery.

Here, he saw, was a chance to give aid where aid was sorely needed. This poor chap was evidently in desperate straits; one look at him and you knew he was half starved.

The derelict shambled into the kitchen, advancing, Thackery noted, with a limp which indicated an injury to the left leg. Something else in his aspect, as he appeared in the brighter light, gave the sensitive professor a degree of shock.

The fellow was haggard and hungry, yes, but he was something else. Once he had limped into the kitchen, he seemed stern rather than humble. His face was hard, his brow lowering. There was a redness in the fellow's eyes and a look of wildness about them which almost frightened Thackery.

His manner suggested nervous tension. His features, though pallid, were molded in heavy, brutish lines. Instead of removing the cap he pulled it farther down over his eyes; then, from under the bent bill, he fixed a brazen stare upon Thackery.

Nevertheless Thackery remained steadfast to his deed of charity. He ushered the man to the seat he had just vacated, waving a generous hand toward the cold roast, the plate of buns and the coffee. The man began a voracious assault upon the food.

Thackery passed through the arch into the living room, sat down, took up the evening paper and resumed reading the news.

He now thoroughly digested all of the columns begun before supper. Then, page by page, he perused the other sheets of the issue. Once or twice he looked over the top of the paper. He could see his guest at the table and he noticed that the fellow, though he continued to wolf the food, kept all the while staring from under the bent bill of the cap at Thackery.

Thackery resumed his reading. At last he turned back to the front page and scanned short items here and there near the bottom.

It was as the professor skipped from one to one of these briefer items that his eye fell upon a single line in a center column. The six words of this line were: "bullet probed from his left thigh".

THACKERY shifted uneasily. He read the adjacent lines. He removed his glasses, wiped them, put them on again and read the entire paragraph. What he read revolted Thackery. He flattened the journal to full sheet, so that he could look above the crease and see to just what caption this bit of text pertained. He read at the top, "Chopper in new chapter of horror".

Thackery turned pale and glanced blinkingly through the dining room arch. There sat the trampish guest, still eating voraciously and still, all the while, keeping a brazen gaze upon Thackery. Thackery winced, recalling that the fellow's limp suggested a recent injury to his left leg.

He dropped his eyes and read more of the story. It was about a felon who was many times a murderer, who was running amok, sought vigilantly by all the legions of the law. Though there was no photograph, there was an accurate description. Ragged overalls—broken billed cap—lame left leg. Heavy, brutal features. Thackery, reading, could well nigh hear the beating of his own heart. His blood was like ice, and his stomach seemed to be a small, cold stone sinking within him.

He arose, the paper still in hand. Making an effort to appear casual and unperturbed, not glancing again through the dining room arch, he moved toward the front exit.

Halfway to it, he became aware that the clatter of fork on plate had ceased. Then he heard a limping step behind him. Just as he reached the door a hand grasped his arm. A voice spoke in his ear—

"Where you goin', brother?"

Thackery whirled to face his guest. The fellow's mien was now worse than sinister. Nor was there any good will in his term of address, "brother", which rasped like a curse upon the professor's nerves. The man's face, so recently pale from hunger, now seemed bloated, flushed to fury. His eyes, wilder than ever, were fixed in a baleful glare; his lips were set in lines of hideous brutality and his brow was like a black, lowering storm cloud brooding doom for the master of the house.

The strength of the man was attested by his grip. Thackery, a recluse and a scholar, was like a child in the grasp of a demon.

"Where you goin', brother?"

"I was just going out for a walk," faltered Thackery. "Make yourself at home."

The man's temper flamed in a blotch of high purple from neck to brow. His grip tightened. Suddenly he flung Thackery around with a snap, then shoved him sprawling into a chair.

"You an' me both, brother. You an' me both gonna make ourselves to home."

Thackery trembled; in the mist before him danced a vision of death. He was aware that the man drew up a chair and sat down knee to knee with him, that the purple flush faded, giving place to an expression of cruel cunning.

"Yeh, we're both of us at home. Nice quiet place, too. Listen; I been hidin' in your garage since last night. I seen that monkey faced cook of yours leave this morning; since then I ain't seen nobody show up 'cept the grocer an' the milkman. Nice car you got out there, too. Too bad I can't drive it. Too bad I never learned to drive a gear shift car, ain't it? Just the same, I'm gonna blow in your car at midnight. An' you, brother, are gonna do the drivin'."

"Me?" gasped Thackery.

"Yeh, you. You'll buzz me to the Sespe Mountains by dawn. You're gonna hit forty-fifty an hour all the way, an' you'll do it with a rod in your ribs."

The man produced a revolver and laid it in his lap.

Thackery was too stunned to reply. He winced as he remembered the trail of atrocities which, according to the newspaper, this fiend had left in his wake.

"Are you—?" he gasped convulsively, but the word failed him.

"Supposin' I am," said the other. "A guy can't always choose his company, can he? I can't. Neither can you. Just the same, here we are. I see you been readin' about that bozo they call the Chopper. What's it say?"

Thackery now became aware that he was still holding the evening paper. He extended it toward his captor. The latter struck it away, saying:

"Read it aloud to me. I only got two hands an' I might need 'em both, if you get funny. Read what it says."

Thackery gulped, then tried to read. But he was like one who, in the grip of nightmare, attempts to shriek, only to be baffled by paralysis in the muscles of his throat. The printed lines swam before his eyes. They had sickened him, even when he had read them to himself. The very thought of reading them aloud to the man whose brutalities they recited brought Thackery to the verge of fainting in his chair.

The man tapped his knee with the revolver.

"Read what it says, brother."

Then, in a hoarse whisper, Thackery managed the first half paragraph:

> "A new chapter of horror has been added to the score of Bert Sollings, terrorist who first ran amok two months ago, with a double bitted ax, on a ranch near San Jacinto. The latest victim, Dr. Hubert Smythe of Monrovia, after probing a .22 bullet from Sollings' left thigh and dressing the wound, was—"

Here Thackery gagged. To save his life he could not have read one word further. Through the mist of stupefaction which nearly blinded him he could see Sollings sitting there, knee to knee with him, scowling, and he was aware that the man's temper was again flaming.

SUDDENLY Sollings snatched the newspaper. He backed his chair a pace farther away; then holding the gun in his right hand and with the paper flat on his lap, he glanced over the column which condemned him as a murderer. The reading fanned his temper. When he came to the paragraph which described the Chopper as wearing ragged overalls and a flat, broken billed cap, with the further statement that his left leg was wounded, the man's rage burst all bounds.

He swore a stream of oaths, then tore the paper into small bits. He tore wildly, viciously, as he might have torn at some human who dared to oppose his escape. He strewed the bits on the floor.

Then again a cold calculation replaced his mood of rage. He ordered Thackery to pick up the scraps and burn them in the fireplace.

Thackery obeyed. In fact the movement gave him a tiny morsel of relief. Toward this particular newspaper he felt almost as bitterly as did Sollings.

When he had burned the last scrap, Sollings barked at him—

"Sit down, brother."

He flourished the revolver, and Thackery, with a sigh of despair, sat down.

For a long while Sollings stared at him intently. His dominant mood now was one of cunning calculation, although the red wildness was ever present in his eyes.

"Listen, brother. I'm gonna lock you up an' grab a snooze o' sleep. I ain't had none lately, see? I need a snooze, a full belly, a fast car an' somebody to drive it. I got to have a new front, too, so I'll wear a suit o' your clothes."

He stared hard at Thackery, letting his pistol pump up and down as though it were a cautioning finger—

"If you cross me I'll put out your light, see?"

"How could you?" gasped Thackery.

"How could I? How couldn't I? Listen, brother, suppose I let you walk outa here? Or get to the telephone? What happens? Hot wires'll happen, an' they'll happen to me. See?"

Was the man so crazed, or was he so ignorant, wondered Thackery, that he feared electrocution in California where the practise is hanging? Or possibly this man had an earlier background of crime, not recited in tonight's paper, which made him fear the penalties of another

State from which he had fled.

The scaffold or the chair—it made no difference. Thackery summoned the muscles of his throat and decided to shriek for help in the hope that some passing motorist might hear him. As for a neighbor's hearing him he had no hope at all. On the east was a high, thick hedge and he knew that the householder living beyond that hedge was out of town. On the west was a vacant lot. To the rear was a ten-acre foothill estate, with the house at the far end, the near end being a grove of oranges.

Nor had he any real hope that he would be heard by a passing motorist. Thackery had built his bungalow deep on his lot so that he himself would not be disturbed by traffic. How, then, could he expect traffic to hear him? Or suppose his cry did reach, faintly, to a motorist! Would the motorist stop? Hardly. He might, but more than likely he wouldn't.

Nevertheless Norbert Thackery cried out at the top of his lungs:

"Help! Police!"

The effort came hoarsely from his lips as Sollings, with a curse, sprang forward. He struck with his gun barrel, once, twice, three times; and for Thackery the lights went out.

He came to in a dark, narrow quarter, groggy, sick with nausea. There was a great lump on the crown of his head. He found himself seated with his back against a wall. He could feel no rug; only a smooth oak floor. For awhile he made no movement to get up.

He was like one who wakes, slowly, from a hideous dream. Bit by bit he remembered that he had fallen into the clutches of some monstrous felon; that he had been struck down; for awhile he could not assemble the threads more closely than that.

There was a stale odor, faintly suggestive of mothballs, in the close air, which gave Thackery the idea that he was immured in a clothes closet. He arose at last to his feet, and could feel a wall at arm's length in each of four directions. Then he groped overhead and felt an electric light bulb which hung by a cord.

Reaching an inch higher, he grasped the switch of this bulb and turned it. His cell became flooded with light. Thackery blinked. He saw instantly that it was the closet of his own bedroom at the rear of the house. He knew as much by the arrangement of walls and shelves, although the several suits and hats which he kept here were gone. So were two suitcases.

He now recalled more of the plans and threats advanced by the felon. Sollings had sworn to equip himself with Thackery's clothes when, after a feed and a brief sleep, he should decamp in Thackery's car. Two suitcases, well packed with tailored garments, would lend character to the man's flight. That, doubtless, explained why the closet had been stripped.

The stillness of the house gave Thackery a faint hope that his captor had already gone. He tried the door. It was locked. And then Thackery heard some one enter the bedroom. He heard a man moving about, pulling open drawers. Sollings, guessed Thackery, was selecting a few shirts and socks. He realized, too, that he himself could not have been unconscious more than an hour. There would then be three or four more hours before Sollings, fed, rested and outfitted with presentable clothing, would leave the house.

Thackery reached overhead and turned off the closet bulb. He stood there miserably, giving ear to the Chopper. Once or twice he heard the fellow curse, with an accent of pain, as though he might have bumped his recently wounded leg.

Thought of how the man had acquired that bad leg brought full details, in a horrifying flood of memory, to Thackery's mind.

Again Thackery felt that cold lump of despair at the pit of his stomach. He trembled. He shrank back against the rear wall of his cell and considered Sollings. The Chopper!

THE string of felonies took shape, like a black chain, and seemed to shackle Thackery, to condemn him. For when he reviewed them, Thackery could see no possible reason to hope that he himself would be spared. Thackery, dead, could tell no tales; whereas Thackery, living, could describe the entire program of flight.

Sollings, Thackery recalled from the news story, two months ago had been a ranch hand down around San Jacinto. He was a surly fellow, and his employer had been on the point of discharging him many times. One day he did discharge Sollings and Sollings flew into a rage. He assaulted the employer, whose brother came to the rescue and ordered Sollings off the ranch. This more than ever angered Sollings, who picked up a double bitted ax, slaughtered both brothers and fled, taking the ax to defend his own flight.

Reviewing this horror, knowing that Sollings was now the one and only tribunal of his own fate, was acid to the soul of Norbert Thackery.

"If you cross me I'll put out your light," Sollings had warned.

But wouldn't he anyway? Even though Thackery remained as meek as a kitten, wouldn't Sollings go the limit toward the protection of his retreat? Wouldn't he burn every bridge behind him?

Thackery heard bed springs creak in the room outside. He realized that the Chopper, now full fed, was seeking sleep. Harried by men and dogs all over Southern California, the Chopper in these last weeks could have had very little repose.

Soon Thackery heard his heavy breathing. That, however, was of no benefit to Thackery. The door was locked. Thackery was not athletic enough to crash it, and if he tried, the racket would merely awaken the maniac.

So Thackery could only crouch there, like a trapped rabbit, groping in a fog of terror to conceive some chance for escape.

Chance? There was no chance. The only chance was for the Chopper to spare him, which was an absurd hope, for the Chopper never gave quarter, not even to dogs.

Thackery winced when he thought of the dogs. Of a dozen posses scouring the San Jacinto neighborhood for Sollings, one had been a two-man party equipped with five bloodhounds. Each man had held a dog on leash while three dogs ranged ahead. When the two men with the leashed dogs came to a cave in a canyon of the San Bernardino foothills, they found the Chopper's ax. They also found three hounds in sections. Sollings, in a fury at being cornered, had cut them to bits. Thackery could picture him standing there, flailing in berserk temper, hacking away long after the brutes were dead.

The posse had lost Sollings' trail at the next concrete highway. That he had probably hitch-hiked toward Los Angeles was evinced by the fact that, fifty days later, he had turned up in Alhambra.

Only three evenings ago he had petitioned an Alhambra housewife, at her kitchen door, for a handout. Not liking his looks, she had turned him down. Whereupon the man, who seemed to know she was alone in the house, became ugly and forced an entry. Fortunately the woman's husband returned from work in time to confront the marauder, who, however, was not driven off until the householder had fired once with a .22 pistol. Blood drops indicated a hit, and fingerprints subsequently proved the man to be Bert Sollings, the Chopper of San Jacinto.

And two evenings later this much wanted felon had sought attention from a country doctor, just east of Monrovia. The doctor probed a .22 bullet from the patient's leg. This doctor happened to be a close student of the news; thus the caliber of the bullet and the age of the infection caused him to suspect his client's identity. Nevertheless he dressed the wound and efficiently bandaged it.

Then he produced a pistol, covered Sollings while with his free hand he reached for the phone.

Sollings sprang, caught the gun wrist, twisted it until the weapon fell. Sollings picked it up. He could have shot the doctor; a shot, however, would have attracted the doctor's family from the other wing of the house. So Sollings, instead of shooting, clubbed the physician down with the gun barrel; he then picked up a surgical knife and cut the victim's throat.

This final chapter of horror had featured tonight's news, and with it, of course, had been included a brief recapitulation of the earlier atrocities. If a mere reading of them had shocked Thackery, what now was his distress as, like a lamb cooped in the slaughter pen, he awaited the pleasure of Sollings?

On the bed beyond the closet door, Sollings snored.

Long, grunting, brutish snores they were; they thumped on the nerves of Thackery like hammers beating upon a wound. He could have screamed—did so once or twice, but the cries only mocked his impotence. Less chance than ever to be heard from the street, for he was now at the rear of the house.

The vigil of terror dragged by, hour by hour, while Sollings slept his sodden sleep. Thackery's panic reached a peak; then, little by little, a resolve to fight took its place. He would go down fighting. When Sollings unlocked the door, Thackery would spring upon him with—

With what?

His hands were empty. Was there a club anywhere in the closet? Anything to beat with, or to stab? Thackery arose and turned on the light bulb.

He saw that one of the two shelves was quite bare. On the other shelf were two small light objects, neither of which would be of the slightest use as a club.

One of these was a candle. It had been brought to aid search for some article in the closet at a time when the bulb was burned out, and then left there. It could hardly weigh two ounces. As a weapon it was useless.

The second object on the shelf was an old and nearly wornout tool of coiffure which had belonged, in her lifetime, to Thackery's wife. A few such feminine appurtenances still remained here and there in odd corners of the house, although Thackery had been a widower for two years. This particular one was an electric curling iron. Too light and short with which to strike a decent blow, he decided; for, even with the cord which was coiled around it, it would scarcely weigh six ounces.

There was nothing else.

THACKERY despaired. Dread camped there with him, and through it all he had to listen to the snoring of the Chopper. How could a man with all that on his conscience sleep? The answer, obviously, was that the Chopper had no conscience. He was a fiend incarnate, a remorseless monster. He was resting between kills like a full fed beast.

That he himself was slated for death Thackery could hold no doubt. He recalled Sollings' plan to use him as a driver, since Sollings did not know how to manipulate a gear shift car. That, of course, was the single reason why Sollings had not already dealt with Thackery as he had dealt with the Monrovia doctor. Once he had used Thackery, once he had forced Thackery to drive him to the Sespe wilderness, he would beyond any reasonable doubt murder Thackery in cold blood.

If Thackery rebelled at driving, he would be slain immediately here in the house. Or, if between midnight and dawn he should shriek for help while driving along the nearly deserted highways, Sollings would surely execute him then and there.

The one and only chance, therefore, lay in getting out of the closet while Sollings still slept. Centering his mind on that thought, Thackery finally conceived the plan of poking a match through the keyhole and thus causing the key to fall to the floor outside. He could see the

heel of the key. It was in the lock. Could he push it out and then rake it to him beneath the door?

He knew that there was a quarter-inch crack at the bottom, that the door could swing inward over a thick Oriental rug on the bedroom floor. Thackery stooped now and removed one of his shoelaces. He held both ends of the lace and began bulging its middle under the crack at the bottom of the door.

The lace was stiff, and he found he could do this very well. He exulted when he realized that he had pushed it so that its middle formed a loop extending a foot into the bedroom. He still held its ends on his own side of the door. The loop was so placed as to be directly under the keyhole.

Thackery now arose and with a match pushed at the heel of the key. Again he exulted when the key moved, as little by little he prodded it through the hole. It fell. He heard it clatter on the floor. He stooped, began pulling cautiously on both ends of the string. His heart gave a leap, for he could feel the resistance of the key.

The scheme was working. The string was like a deep bellied net, the key like a fish coming to the hand of the fisherman.

Then, with a start, he realized that the snorings of Sollings had ceased. Had the clatter of the falling key awakened him? Thackery was in a sweat of suspense as he raked the key toward him, nearer to the crack. At last the toe of the key, which alone had been hooked by the string, appeared beneath the door. His fingers trembled as he reached for it.

Then, suddenly, he heard a step in the bedroom. The key disappeared.

"Better be good, brother," came the voice of the Chopper, "or I'll come in there an' work on you."

Snatching that key was like snatching an eye from Thackery. It crushed his last hope.

He again heard the bed springs creak; in a minute more he again heard the heavy breathing of sleep. Sollings, of course, would now have the key in his pocket.

For that reason there was a faint color of light at the keyhole. Kneeling, Thackery put his eye there. The light was on in the bedroom. He could not see the bed. All he could see was about a square foot of the dresser, on the far side of the room.

The field of vision chanced to include, however, a clock which stood on the dresser. It registered ten minutes after eleven. Thackery had, therefore, been in the closet slightly less than four hours. In fifty minutes more he was due to be taken out.

He stood at bay with clenched fists; he resolved to leap out, to beat and claw and kick when, at midnight, Sollings opened the door. For a lifetime of minutes Thackery nurtured that resolve, as he stood there in the closet, while the snores of Sollings again broke the stillness of the house.

It was a glance at the electric curling iron lying there on the shelf which caused an amendment to his plan. Instantly he grasped this tool, whose green cord, double, twisted and with each strand separately insulated, was wrapped around the wooden handle of the iron to which it was attached.

Except for a candle it was the only thing offered by the shelf.

Thackery struck a match, lighted the candle and set it upright. He then turned out the light bulb, giving a dimmer illumination to the closet. He unscrewed the bulb from the socket and laid it aside. He now unwrapped the green, twisted connection cord from the curling iron. The cord was about four feet long. One end was embedded in the butt of the curling iron; on the other end was a screw plug which could be inserted in any socket.

Thackery screwed the plug into the socket over his head. Reaching an inch higher, he turned the switch. The scissored, metal stem of the curler now began to heat, slowly.

This, he decided, was an implement of

defense far more potent than his fists. Grasping the thing by its wooden handles, he held it behind him. He was ready for Sollings. Sollings, at midnight, would open the door, commanding Thackery to emerge from the closet. Thackery would refuse. Sollings would then reach in to yank him out. Thackery planned to swipe him across the eyes with the hot curler; then, as Sollings was momentarily disconcerted, dash for a window.

The closet was now only dimly lighted. With the hot iron held behind Thackery's back, Sollings would not immediately see it.

Summoning his nerve for this encounter, Thackery waited again. At last the snoring from the bedroom ceased. He heard Sollings rise, heard him limp back and forth across the floor.

Then came the scraping of the key in the lock. The door was opened, and there stood Sollings.

SOLLINGS, standing well without the closet, produced the revolver and covered Thackery. The change in the outlaw astonished the captive. His features registered the same cruelty, the same viciousness as before, but before going to sleep he had washed and shaved. He had donned a white shirt, a brown necktie, a serge suit and tan shoes, all selected from Thackery's effects. In place of the old cap was Thackery's best felt hat. Behind the man stood two bulging suitcases. Thus equipped, on casual inspection he would hardly be taken for the Chopper.

Looking beyond him, Thackery saw that the clock stood at exactly midnight.

"We blow in five minutes, brother. Just as soon as I load the car. An' when I say you're gonna drive, I mean it. I ain't gonna argue with you, brother. First time you say no will be the last time you say anything."

Sollings did not come in, nor did he invite Thackery from the closet. He slammed the door, turned the key and withdrew it from the lock. Thackery heard him limp out of the room, no doubt carrying the suitcases to the garage.

Despair again possessed Thackery. Of what use now was his heated curler? He could not charge out with it because it was picketed to a four-foot cord. He had planned to refuse to emerge, forcing Sollings to enter the closet and there, at close quarters, swipe him with the iron. But Sollings was in no mood for such measures. He wouldn't argue, but would stand outside the closet and shoot Thackery at the latter's first word of rebellion.

Evidently he had opened the door just now to issue that ultimatum, as well as to assure himself that Thackery was able to drive the car. After battering Thackery unconscious and throwing him in the closet, Thackery might not have been physically competent for the ordeal planned by Sollings. Evidently the inspection had satisfied the fellow, and in a few minutes he would be back.

And now, in the last ditch of desperation, a mighty inspiration came to Thackery. His senses grasped at a means of defense which packed such a wallop that the very conception of it staggered him. It was a thing he must prepare in this brief respite while Sollings was at the garage.

Would it work? Could Thackery strike at Sollings through that solid oak door? Could he pierce Sollings with an unseen sword even before the door was opened?

Thackery reasoned that it would largely depend on what Sollings would do if, when he tried to insert the key, the keyhole seemed to be blocked by a wad of rag or paper. This would naturally irritate Sollings. He was of a temperish turn, anyway, and just now he was particularly impatient to be on his way. He would therefore push the key in, attempting to force the obstruction out. And as he did this, with his other hand he was almost sure to rattle the door knob. He would rattle the knob both from impatience and to make sure the door was still locked.

Also, reasoned Thackery, it might de-

pend upon the physical condition of Sollings, the strength of his heart and his resistance to an unexpected shock. As to this, Thackery did not know; he did know, though, that the heart stamina and physical condition to be tested were those of a sorely harried fugitive, half starved these last two months.

Thackery now reached overhead and snapped off the switch. He no longer cared whether his iron was cold or hot. Holding it by the wooden handle, he jerked the twisted, green connection cord out by the roots. He unraveled the last foot of the cord, making two cords of it. The current now being off, he put one fork between his teeth. He bit, chewed, tore at the insulation until he had exposed an inch of copper wire.

This wire was itself composed of a score of tiny strands, or filaments. The four-foot length of cord just allowed its lower end, now stripped of insulation, to reach the keyhole. Thackery stuffed it into the keyhole and about halfway through. He knew that if a key were pressed in persistently from the other side, its heel would become embedded in the score of tiny filaments, like a finger being pressed into the hair of a brush.

Thackery next stripped an inch of insulation from the second fork of his cord. This end he bent around the stem of the gun metal door knob, which was about eight inches above the keyhole. Thackery recalled that in the original building of this house, this closet door had been equipped only with a knob and latch. A year later, as an extra precaution against the burglary of clothing, he had had a lock put in the door. The lock was, therefore, in no metallic contact with the stem which, eight inches above, joined the inside and outside knob.

His wiring was no more than done when Thackery heard the limping approach of Sollings. He stood on tiptoe, reaching overhead for the light switch. He grasped it. It was off; he did not immediately turn it on.

He waited. He heard the key being inserted. Then there came an oath from Sollings as the key encountered an obstruction. A movement of the lower wire indicated a persistent thrust of the key. Then came another oath—and a rattling of the door knob.

Therefore Sollings had one hand on the key and the other on the knob.

Thackery snapped on the switch.

An instant later he heard a resounding thump on the floor of the bedroom. After that, complete silence except for the beating of Thackery's heart. Thackery stooped. His shoestring was still on the floor. Again he forced it in a bow under the door. He arose, pulled the wire from the keyhole and thrust in a match. He heard the key fall. He stooped again and, quickened by his earlier practise, raked the key to his hand.

He unlocked the door and stepped out.

There, prone on the rug, face up, lay Sollings. He was shocked senseless.

Voltage, the invisible sword, had flashed through his flesh. Thackery rolled him into the closet and locked the door.

The Boy Bandit of Mukden

By JAMES W. BENNETT

SOLDIERS, actors, barbers—in China these three are without caste. Since the gray, chill dawn of time, the Celestial has looked with fear and loathing upon the soldier. Yet it has been the man of war who repeatedly usurped the Dragon Throne.

The last of these raiders to swoop down, hawk-like, on China from the hinterland was a small, frail looking Oriental who bore the ominous nickname of the "Boy Bandit of Mukden". So successful was his thrust that he contemplated overthrowing the young republic. He dreamed dreams of emulating his Manchurian predecessors and crowning himself the Son of Heaven. He even went so far as to employ a Chinese tailor to cut and sew for him a full regalia of Dragon Robes.

This man was Chang Tso-lin.

As a boy, in a small Manchurian hamlet, he was indistinguishable from the hundred or so urchins of his age. He worked in his father's fields, eating meat once a month if the harvests were good, virtually starving for days on end when drought seared the land.

Then a group of bandits—always a scourge in Manchuria—swooped down upon Chang's village. His luck saved him, for at the time he was away in the hills, sent out to hunt birds to fill the empty cookpot. When he returned home his hamlet was in ruins. His father and mother were dreadful lumps of charred flesh. They had been used as torches to assist in the conflagration.

The seed millet and *kaoliang* had been stolen; Chang had no money to buy more. At this juncture he showed evidence of the leadership which was later to flower so vigorously. He banded together a nucleus of boys who had similarly escaped the holocaust. They vowed vengeance upon the murderers. From a brigand—wounded in the struggle with the villagers and left to die—Chang learned the name and birthplace of the brigand chief.

With his little troop Chang plunged into the hills and at once began a career of banditry. As soon as he felt his strength to be adequate, he led his band against the village which had given to the world the murderer of Chang's parents. In true Oriental fashion, instead of avenging himself directly upon the killer, Chang sought to set fire to the bodies of the brigand's parents. He succeeded.

Although his vow was fulfilled, his purpose accomplished, Chang found he could not easily give up the wild, free —and profitable—life of Oriental Robin Hood. He returned to the hills and began recruiting his band to greater and greater strength.

At last a lethargic provincial governor was forced to take cognizance of Chang. He sent an army against the young bandit. Chang's brigands soundly defeated the punitive forces and they retreated with much confusion to Mukden, the "capital of the three provinces".

The governor hurriedly offered to compromise with the youthful menace—then barely in his twenties. Chang replied that he would cease his depredations if he were given a general's com-

mission and if his entire band were taken into the Manchurian army.

The terms were accepted. And sorry terms they proved to be for the governor. He soon lost his gubernatorial post and then forfeited his head—literally—into the bargain.

Chang's subsequent rise to a national figure was rapid. Like Nurhatchi, his Manchu predecessor, he began to harry the southland, thrusting his way deeper and deeper into the rich, but poorly protected, lands of China proper.

After a time China became aroused, and sent great armies against him. Twice Chang was thrown back in defeat. The young "Wolf of the North" withdrew, licking his wounds and reorganizing his armies.

The third time his luck came to the rescue. Just as he was on the verge of an even more crushing defeat, the two generals in command of the armies of the Chinese republic clashed. One of them treacherously marched backward on Peking, captured the defenseless capital of China and handed it over to Chang. This was in 1924.

Then it was that the Boy Bandit, a boy no longer, son of a poverty stricken peasant father, marched into China's capital to become virtual dictator of all Cathay. He did not accept the presidency of the republic, preferring to raise a figurehead executive who would do his bidding.

It was at this time that Chang—dazzled by success—ordered his outfit of Dragon Robes. But he soon found that the job of dictating to all China was a harder task than ruling Manchuria. For one thing, the treacherous general who had handed him Peking on a platter was showing signs of double-crossing Chang. For a year the two antagonists fenced warily, neither willing to declare the ostensible alliance at an end, but each waiting for the other to make a false move. And Chang realized that the usurpation of the throne would be the very play that his antagonist would welcome. The gorgeous yellow robes were packed and sent to Mukden. And Chang thus avoided the rash act that might have caused all China to rise flaming against him.

Although on this issue he did not tempt fate, perhaps along other lines he believed too implicitly in his stars. He was warned by geomancers—those shrewd professional soothsayers—not to make a certain train journey north from Peking to Mukden. Unquestionably the geomancers realized that Chang's growing arrogance in the handling of Manchurian politics had angered a nearby Oriental nation; hence any prophecy of evil stood a remarkably good chance of fulfillment.

Warned though he was, Chang took the train. As it was crossing a bridge—a span guarded by soldiers of this neighboring power—a bomb exploded. Peculiarly enough, the charge went off at the precise moment that Chang's private car was on the bridge. The train was thoroughly wrecked.

Although badly wounded, Chang did not die—then. He was carried back to Mukden. For weeks thereafter bulletins were issued daily, detailing the progress of his recovery. Orders were issued in his name. Chang himself, however, was never seen.

During those weeks his army was brought to full fighting strength. Mukden was kept under martial law, and its streets resounded with the iron tramp of his soldiers' boots. They were prepared to contest any attempt to usurp the dictatorship of the house of Chang.

At last the secret could no longer be kept. A bulletin was issued stating that Chang had taken a turn for the worse; and then, that he had died. His son, Chang Hsueh-liang, in the autumn of 1928, took over his father's baton.

And thus today the grandson of a peasant, the son of a bandit, is ruler over a third of China. So powerful is the kingdom builded for him by his father that he gives only nominal allegiance to the Chinese republic. The brigand king is dead! Long live the king!

A Story of the Zeppelins

BRUTE MASTER

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

CAPTAIN CARL BUCER, German army air service, was a brute. They say he was a brute when he was with Austrian cavalry; and later with the Crown Prince's 5th Army headquarters troop. He was transferred from each, then foisted into army air service. Lighter-than-air, the Zeppelins, fell heir to him and his brutality. The enlisted men, of course, were the ones who came right out flat-footed and said that Herr Bucer was this, that and the other thing. They said all those things with true enlisted-man emphasis; for the enlisted man of all services is the same wherever and whenever you find him. It's the truth they tell, and right out loud.

As for Captain Bucer's fellow officers; they too said he was a brute. But, being officers and gentlemen, they modified the statement, smiled and called

him a brute master. Which was very nice of the fellow officers. Also it was very expedient, for it ill becomes one officer to slam another. It just isn't done in any service.

Bucer, though, was a master. Brute master, if you must. He was a master soldier in the service of a country that had soldiers. No man, even among the enlisted men, ever questioned the militaristic qualities of the captain. He had been brave even in those old-line outfits that had been so glad to get rid of him. Now, with lighter-than-air, the personal bravery of the brute was so pronounced that it stood out and was recognized.

Bucer, though young, was old school. He couldn't, or wouldn't, adjust himself to a new service. He lived by the book, by the old and brutal book that says a soldier must do this thing, and nothing else. But air service, any branch of any air service, can not be run by the book. Soldiering and flying could never get together, anywhere.

Captain Bucer believed that his men should be on duty all the time, from the beginning of war till the end. That in itself was brutal, for men at war must be turned loose now and then. The captain would never give an enlisted man a single day off, even when the ship was deflated in its shed because of weather or repairs. If possible, he would apply the same rule to his officers. He himself was always on the job.

In the air, Captain Bucer flew long missions. Regardless of the weather, or the time of year, he'd keep his ship aloft longer than any other craft in a given group action. Twenty-four hours, thirty-five hours, two full days, such were the lengths of time he'd keep a crew away from the home base. And this in the dead of Winter, over the North Sea. And later, over the unspeakably cold Baltic. He brought men home with frozen hands, feet, legs, ears and cheeks. He brought men home frozen stiff in death. His men came home with pneumonia. They came back with frozen lungs. The rest of the service said that his was a three-crew ship: One crew in the hospital, one on duty and the third standing by ready to take over.

And there was no hand to stop Bucer. The High Command knew only one thing about Captain Bucer; Captain Carl Bucer brought his ship back.

Captain Bucer did bring his ship back, time and again. That was important, paramount. All Zeppelin commanders were not doing that. Fact is, too few of those raiding Zeppelins were returning. And the High Command was going thumbs down on lighter-than-air. As for the people of Germany, they had already gone thumbs down on a service that swelled the dead bulletins in so many towns. Therefore the commander who came back with his shield, instead of on it, was bound to win the favor of a war office that made no claims upon the thing called human kindness. It was an iron office; and Bucer was of it—an iron man.

Captain Bucer, however, wasn't competing with other Zeppelin commanders. Nor was he a man to curry favor from the High Command. He was too self-reliant, too bull headed for that. Had he been capable of those things, he'd be like the rest; hard perhaps, but possessed of some soft spots. And if he had had soft spots, he could not have been so damnably brutal. No, he was just Bucer; his own man, and a tough one. What's more, Captain Bucer was more than two hundred pounds of hard and tough man. Two hundred and eighteen pounds, to be exact.

RAIDING England was losing its appeal and popularity with Germany's lighter-than-air services at about the time Russia was making the transition from white to red. Anyway, the job of raiding England was more the navy's dish than it was the army's. At times the two airship services had united, but no two services of any country can work together. Maybe that was why the

army air service found its few remaining Zeppelins detailed to the Baltic patrol.

Russia was breaking fifty ways from center. It was, from a military point of view, neither fish nor flesh. But the wild thing, howling on that Eastern Front, was yet a menace. Broken now, it might run amok tomorrow. Almost done for today, the bear might come to and display his strength in the near future. So Germany was of a mind that the Russian menace should be put down once and for all. Clear that front, was the idea, and release its man power for the theater of operations in the west.

Germany, however, had no French ideas. Germany did not think that any Grand Army was quite grand enough to march into that boundless, endless country to the north and east. But there was one means of offense: propaganda. Fly propaganda into and over Russia. Give that people the one thing that is dear and near to their hearts. Let the Russian on the Front know what is happening back in reddest Petrograd. Next, carrying it to the limit, let those in Petrograd, Moscow, Kiev and Kharkov know what is happening on the Front, and at points west. The news on points west, of course, to be doped a bit.

Flying over that country was close akin to dying in the country. The men who took propaganda over Russia took their lives in their hands. If the Russian troops couldn't get them, chances were the Russian weather would. At any rate, the betting was very much against the aircraft that braved the try. As for airplanes, Gothas and other large ships had dared it, and failed. The Zeppelin, with its much longer cruising time, was the logical means toward the dangerous end. And Herr Bucer was the man chosen to go over that border, head for distant Petrograd and prepare to drop printed matter there and at other important points.

Of course, printed matter was not the only stuff to be dropped. There were marked spots on the map where troop concentrations, ammunition dumps and important railroad junctions could easily absorb any given tonnage of German bombs. Also, there were any number of known points where the Zeppelins, flying low, could give their machine gunners all kinds of target practise; and this with little or no danger from Russian planes. Russian airplanes, such as they were, were hard to find.

Then again, the thing wasn't so easy. A Zeppelin operating against troops does so in a shower of rifle slugs. There were plenty of anti-aircraft batteries too. Also field pieces, with trail spades dug in and muzzles high. And worst of all—to repeat and emphasize—the weather.

Brute Bucer brought his 1917 model Zeppelin up to Königsburg in the dead of Winter. That ship, the *Grottkau,* flew the three hundred and eighty miles from Friedrichshafen, clear across Prussia, in twelve hours. It was against a blinding snowstorm, and at a rate of speed hardly exceeding thirty miles per hour. A brutal, man-killing piece of air work. A job that called for a Bucer. Any other commander would have waited for weather; and the delay would have been sanctioned by the higher-ups.

More sick men were unloaded when the *Grottkau* put down at Königsburg. There were no replacements there, either. Bucer said that it was just as well. He could carry more bombs and bulky printed matter. Also, a skeleton crew would be better, considering that the captain intended flying a long mission. Better, perhaps, for the carrying ability of the ship. Not better, however, for the men who must work such a long shift. But why should Bucer care for these? Was it not war? Were not these men as much German as he? Certainly they were.

He, Captain Carl Bucer, was not asking for short hours. No! Then no man under him would be pampered. Twenty-six men was the complement of that six-motored *Grottkau.* Must the captain break down and cry because

only nineteen were fit for further duty when his ship arrived for Russian duty? Not much! Fly he would, and they must.

Immediately upon landing, without food or rest, the brute set his crew to work at the many tasks and problems that attend the servicing of a great ship of air. Fuel to be taken aboard. Water for ballast. Bombs to be handled and racked, for the *Grottkau* had come up without a bomb load. Motors to be drained of oil, then refilled. Minor repairs and adjustments on those fine Maybach engines—ignition to be checked and points to be set. All devilish close work in a hellishly cold climate.

Then there was oil and grease to be cleaned from power gondolas and the great ship's slick sides. Work, work, work! Jobs that could have waited—should have waited till such time as a tired crew had taken on food and rest. But the latter two waited for the former—for the work's completion—which was the way of the brute. Herr Carl Bucer never quit the *Grottkau* for a second; nor ate nor slept till he had her all ready to be reported "in commission". And then, with all that tough work put away, the captain merely said:

"Eat now. And hold yourselves ready for immediate duty."

So the *Grottkau* was serviced, loaded, ready. Ten tons of bombs were in her racks. Five tons of crackling, consonant filled, Russian printed matter were stowed in her cargo cabin, midships, to every side of the dropping chute. Machine guns were well supplied, and her fuel tanks were filled to the last liter.

So heavy in everything was she that it took very little water ballast to weigh her off. The captain took care of that—weighed her off and was ready to rise and fly even before flight orders were in his hand. Without doubt, he knew that the orders would soon be arriving. So he went looking for those orders, instead of looking for personal comfort, food and sleep. And he secured the official communication, plus a very poor weather report. But he was the man to make his own weather; so he called his first officer. The first officer was to see that the crew was notified. The *Grottkau* would fly northeast within the hour.

THE hour in question was just five hours from the time the *Grottkau* had set down at the base, Königsburg. It was six o'clock of a dark February evening. There was snow on the ground, plenty of it. There was more snow in the air, and the drifting clouds were low. The wind was light, so the ship could be walked from its shed in safety.

Herr Bucer did not point out this fact, but his first officer knew that the light wind was the real cause for haste. The captain would not run chances of that wind's increasing. He must not risk the danger that his ship might be tied up in its shed for a day or more while all hands, idle and talking, waited for the wind to fall. Better that they run the risk of rough weather up above. Yes, far better that they get under way and chance whatever the night might bring. Was it not war?

Within fifteen minutes the first officer had rounded up all but one man. He reported to Captain Bucer, saying that the one man, a topside machine gunner, refused duty. The man was willing to stand before a wall, but he would not report for this mission without sleep.

"And where is Gunner Hesse?" Captain Bucer asked, in his even, cold voice. "Sleeping in the boiler room, you say? I will see the gunner in person."

The crew of the *Grottkau,* standing by and shivering there under the long silver ship, saw Captain Bucer bring Gunner Hesse into the shed. Hesse had been worked over. He wasn't a very big man, nor was he too small. What was left of him wasn't worth defending; and Herr Captain Bucer draped said remains over a pile of hydrogen tanks.

"Gunner Hesse," said Herr Bucer,

"was thoughtless. It is a grievous offense to refuse duty. A man must not place himself in jeopardy. Lieutenant Luben—" this to his first officer— "you will open the doors. We will start."

Before the doors could be opened, one other man, shivering and teeth chattering, reeled and fell. The crew looked to the captain. The captain looked at the man, reached up and opened the door of the control car, then tossed the sick man aboard.

"March!" he snapped; and the sullen crew walked the doors apart.

They walked the *Grottkau* into the open, aided by half a hundred laborers of the base. Fifty silent laborers who, perhaps, wondered what manner of man this big captain might be. It isn't likely that they had heard of the brute master, for idle gossip does not travel far in an iron country during war.

When the base handling crew finally turned the great airship loose, tossing her into the night, there was little of the glory and panoply of war in the setting forth. The *Grottkau* was moving out to battle, true enough, but not as an army with banners. Nor with sounding brass and trumpets. She was just a droning shadow, sneaking off into the black night. A thing that swelled up, slowly, to meet the very limited visibility of the dark canopy above.

She was something that seemed to belong to a world apart. It wasn't at all natural—far off there in that bleak corner of the world—for men to be carrying propaganda and battle to other men fully five hundred miles away. And the men doing the carrying, tired and sick, had little heart for the job in hand. But the moving spirit was Bucer.

Captain Bucer, with his face toward the Russian border, stood behind his helmsman. By the hour, motionless, he would stand that way, a graven image. Weather—Devil take the worst of weather! Bucer would call the bluff of the very elements. He'd stand there and seem not to see the weather. Seem not to notice a sky ahead that gave no possible range of visibility. Stand there and brute it through. And his officers and navigating crew, mere humans, would look to him for the word that might turn them back. They'd wait!

The *Grottkau* went as direct as possible to an elevation of 4000 feet. The sky was bad there. Slowly, dropping water ballast, she went to 5000. There was a stiff wind out of the north at that elevation. From 5000 feet, in a blinding snowstorm, Captain Bucer ordered her up to 7000. The lookout atop the ship telephoned down to the control car, saying that his station was more than any man could endure. In a few words Captain Bucer convinced that man that it could be endured; and you'd wonder why a commander should keep a lookout atop that ship during hours of the cruise when that man could serve no purpose. Discipline!

For two long hours the *Grottkau* faced and fought the storm. Then the load of ice and snow began to fight back. The great ship was losing altitude. In time, were that to continue, the craft would be forced to the ground. This, and this alone, was the thing that could defeat Bucer. He could not afford to lighten ship so early in the game by dropping either water ballast or cargo. So he must turn, try to fly around the storm, or wait till such time as the sky should open for his passage.

The wireless operator got in touch with stations at Stolp, Stargard and Sassnitz. Widely separated points; and they each offered weather reports that were not too bad. That being the case, Herr Bucer would wait for weather. Deciding that, he turned the ship about, cruised west over the Baltic, then south.

At nine o'clock, when the lookout atop the ship should have telephoned in his hourly check, there was no ring. Captain Bucer, at 9:01, stepped to the phone and buzzed the topside platform. No answer came back to him. He ordered the watch officer aloft. With all

haste and no back talk the watch officer went topside. He found no lookout there. But down the starboard side of the elephantine envelop there was still traced, in the snow, a path where something, or some one, had passed. The lookout had taken the easiest way, the only way out for him. And for another man, the war had ended.

Captain Bucer logged the happening, and sent another man aloft. To his station behind his helmsman, face front, he again went. A few thousand feet below the *Grottkau* was the black Baltic. There were clouds, but little storm, down there. A Zeppelin could carry on nicely, indefinitely, in such a sky. Nevertheless, the cold was killing; even more intense than back there in the storm. For the crew, dogging and stalling in such a manner, this stage of the patrol was harder than any actual mission a ship could fly. At ten o'clock, still flying low, the ship passed over the home base.

Then Bucer crossed back and forth over that district many times between ten and midnight. His wireless was in touch with the base; and light markers were kept burning. As at the start, that base district was under tossed and broken clouds, with little or no wind. The *Grottkau* could easily have been landed and housed. Time and again, as her nose swung back toward the sheds, her suffering crew half guessed that Bucer was going to put his ship down for a landing.

That hope, though, was not to be realized. Captain Bucer must not try for a landing—with such a load and at night. An airship, while in flight, is an airship. But an airship, the second it reached the ground, was likely to be almost anything, perhaps a wreck. Especially in even a light wind. And so with a commander: he was a commander just so long as he had a craft to command. A Zeppelin, as Bucer saw it, was of an inestimable value. As for men, there were plenty of them.

So the *Grottkau* cruised through the long night. Every man of the skeleton crew stood his post. There was no good reason why these men should not. Hadn't generations of seafaring Germans remained awake and on duty—harder duty than this—through endless, twenty-four-hour long days of storm. Yes, seafaring Germans had done that thing and were still doing it. Likewise the men of all other seagoing nations. Moreover, this was war, and the *Grottkau* would be heading northeast any time now.

ALONG toward dawn a wireless communication from the northern border said that the storm had abated. There was still snow falling, the operator reported, but the fury of the night had passed. Captain Bucer gave his order to the wheel, called for cruising speed on all motors, and the *Grottkau* was on her way. At exactly the twelve-hour mark, since her take-off, she once more passed northward above the base sheds.

And again, there was no glory or panoply attached to her faring forth. Just a shadow, hardly a noisy one, slithering away into the early morning gloom. A few minutes more and even the sound of her motors had quit the locality over which she had cruised for so long. Back and forth. Back and forth. Man-killing. Heart-breaking.

The first true light of the cold Winter dawn found the ship back at 4000 feet. She was nearing the border once more. The world below was white carpeted; and there were great promises of a clearing. Motors barked in the keen northern air; and the men of the *Grottkau* were rationed the first dole of hot food to come their way since the top hour of midnight. Hot grub, poor as it was. There's not another thing that will put more new life in a man. Why, with a snack of potato bread, sausage and hot rum a man could go on and—

A starboard motor, in the bow gondola, backfired with a bang. The change of tempo was noticed in all gon-

dolas and the control car. All heads turned in the direction of the explosion. The propeller of that power unit had stopped, and a whipping wisp of black smoke trailed behind. The engine man had pushed open his side ports, and he was fighting fire. The affair was more than a one-man fight, however.

Bucer and his watch officer, picking up men as they went, made their way toward the trouble. Up ladders, along the catwalk and down into the inferno they went. As they arrived on the scene of fire, the other five motors were idled. The *Grottkau's* headway fell off. The north wind brought her to a full stop, then drifted her south. And, as she hung there without either headway or drift, the flames from the gondola lapped straight up through seams and fitting openings.

The engine man was half hanging from an open port, and his clothing was on fire. His hand extinguisher was exhausted. Seconds more, and the man must take the works, or take to the long, last drop. And in that tight second, with the fire filling the whole gondola, it was the brute master who quit the leading-down ladder, bellied flat across the slick top of the gondola, hung by his hooked toes and pulled the engine man out of the port and up over the side. Then, without a second thought for the man rescued, Captain Bucer passed that man to a third person on the ladder overhead. The fire was quickly got under control and was completely extinguished within five minutes of its beginning.

Now, perhaps, the captain would run for home. It would not do to carry on with that bow motor dead. Other motors had been repaired while aloft, and this one would be too. So, drifting there in the sub-zero sky, just south of the border, Captain Bucer ordered all mechanics to the fire raked gondola. Drifting, with five motors turning just fast enough to keep them from freezing, the *Grottkau* kept her nose into the wind; and a frantic repair job went into work on that dead motor. It was no minor repair. An intake valve was "holding open", allowing the cylinder to backfire into the carburetor. Hence the fire.

It would take a lot of nut twisting and knuckle skinning before that valve could be adjusted. Then, besides the valve trouble, a generator and most of the engine's insulation had been burned away. There was a week's work there—for a hangar crew. But air crews don't work at hangar pace, so the job was bound to be cleaned up in jig time.

It was cold, cramped work. Half a dozen men, doing half a dozen things, in a space hardly large enough for two mechanics. And Captain Bucer, knowing much about cavalry mounts and little of air motors, stood there at the foot of the ladder. Never a word from him. Just that iron stare. Men worked under him, doing the impossible and knowing that it was the only thing they could do. There was fear in Bucer's crew. No denying that. He was one man in a million. One of the few iron men who have the metal to demand, and get.

So the work went ahead, the wind shifted more to the west and the low temperature fell even lower. The air was filled with that silver glimmer which comes with the hellish cold of the far north. Men coughed. They grew more sullen. Their fingers grew more and more useless; and the cold tool steel clung to the human flesh it touched. Clung to the flesh, then pulled it away, bleeding and stiff.

Two of the mechanics sat on the floor of the gondola and smiled that queer smile that comes to a man who no longer feels the cold. Bucer, in person, pulled those men off the floor boards, lugged them up the ladder and replaced them with others. Nothing stopped him.

Broad daylight was with them when the repair was complete. It was eight o'clock, and nearly two full hours of work had gone into the job. Starting the motor, after its long and cold layoff, was bound to be a task harder than

mere words can picture. Hot water, rushed from each of the other running engines, had to be lugged. If there's anything harder than lugging water up and down ladders and along catwalks, name it! While the acrobatic stalwarts brought and poured water into the radiator, four other men held hissing blowtorches to the motor. Except for the one man at the wheel, and the lookout atop ship, all hands—including Captain Bucer—worked on that motor-starting. It was 8:40 before the cold engine kicked over, hit and ran. By then the crew of the *Grottkau* was worn to a frazzle.

Each man went back to his station. Back on her Petrograd course went the ship. Back to stand behind his helmsman went the brute master. Ahead toward the frontier, through a clear sky, sailed the *Grottkau*. On the frontier ahead, in such a sky, there would be trouble waiting. The ship was low. She must remain low, too, for her topside was still coated heavily with ice and snow. Frozen there. And no sun could melt that weighty layer from the craft. If she had 5000 feet of altitude at the frontier, they'd be lucky.

One of the men, lifted from the floor boards of the fire gondola and carried to be laid alongside the engine in another power car, wasn't doing very well. Fact is, the man was going to make a die of it, sure. First Officer Luben, breaking all precedent, brought the matter directly to Captain Bucer. Lieutenant Luben told his superior that the man must surely die, unless he could be landed very soon. The frontier was still far ahead. It was not too late to make a landing in any one of several suitable places. Luben forcefully urged this.

"Lieutenant Luben," Captain Bucer said, "the individual does not enter a military problem. No man counts. And, Lieutenant Luben, you will not again lay yourself open to insubordination. Am I clear?"

He was clear. As for young Luben, he had made his try and failed. Being a pretty good soldier, he said no more.

The *Grottkau* was then passing over Kaunas, Lithuania. It was ideal for a landing, for there was a lighter-than-air base there. Also there were hospitals. Captain Bucer merely looked down his nose at the passing city; and the route led on to Petrograd, more than 400 miles northeast.

The logy, heavy craft wasn't making more than fifty miles per hour. Eight hours or more before they'd reach Petrograd, providing they had far better luck than the Zeppelins that had tried the same mission. Yes, there'd been others. An army Zeppelin or two. Also, from their Baltic patrol base at Wainoden, the navy Zeppelins had given the adventure a whirl. Nearly all had come to grief. Not a ship had made the goal. For the best part, it was the Russian weather that beat those other commanders. But here was a commander who cared little or nothing for weather.

ALONG toward ten o'clock the wireless operator got a weather report from the German naval radio station in Neumünster. Such reports from Neumünster were the best to be had. That station got its Russian weather direct from the Russians. That is, it decoded the Russian wireless communications picked up. But the report, perfect as it might have been, was not a good report for Captain Bucer. The operator gave his superior the Petrograd district data on a slip of paper. Bucer read the brief jottings, then poker-faced his emotions.

Only he and the wireless operator knew that the going ahead, far ahead, was not so good. However, Captain Bucer would handle that part of the mission when his ship arrived in that part of the country. So, as ever, the killingly cold cruise carried on and on. It was forty below zero.

By noon the wind had stiffened to gale proportions. Being out of the

northwest, it was a cross-wind for the ship. With all motors full on and her nose into the blow, the *Grottkau* was crabbing sidewise in an attempt to keep on her course. She was making little or no headway, and Captain Bucer was confronted with the fact that his command was being carried far inland. Kraslava, fully fifty miles east of his intended route, was just to starboard at one o'clock. At that rate, and with the existing wind, the *Grottkau* could never expect to reach Petrograd. It just wasn't possible to push her great bulk, with the power of six engines, through and against such a wind.

Eighteen hours' hell behind them, and now this. Was the brute master to be turned back? Again, to a man—including the sick—the crew hoped that this was the case. Turn Bucer back? Not while Bucer had life and a single motor left with him. If he couldn't go ahead, he'd go into some other quarter of the enemy's country. Russia was big, and targets were many. His purpose would not be fully defeated. Deciding that way, he ordered the *Grottkau* swung about. She turned her tail into the wind, put her bow into the east, and Moscow, four hundred and twenty-five miles distant, became her goal.

The great ship was now bowling along with the push of the tailwind sending her speed well over one hundred miles per hour. Two o'clock came, and so did the important railroad junction of Velikiye Luki. At 2:15 the *Grottkau* was directly above the railroad yards. Bucer dumped some reading matter and some bombs. There was no way of knowing how much damage the literature would cause; but when the sky crew saw strings of freight cars jump into the air, then burst into flame, they had a fair idea of the damage done by the bombs dropped.

Captain Bucer, quitting his position behind the helmsman, stood at a side window and studied the damage. Coldly, with never the sign of an emotion, he estimated the value of his passing; then, just as coldly and deliberately, entered the event in the log of his ship.

Following the railroad, and riding at 5000 feet, the raider flew on toward the next junction, Rzhev. Midway between the two cities she came upon a three section troop train. The entire troop movement was snowbound. The soldiers were digging out, black ants on a white spread. Captain Bucer ordered propellers reversed. As she came down on the trains, the *Grottkau* had lost much of her great speed. Her bombing officer stood ready for the command. Her machine gunners were at their posts.

Midway of the first train section she dropped her first bomb. It was a direct hit, and men were dying down there. But men were also fighting and firing down there. In the clear air they had seen the oncoming raider at a great distance, and they were prepared. Into a hail from the Russians' English made Lee-Enfield rifles the *Grottkau* flew. She was hit time and again. A bomber, standing near the open traps in the long belly, stopped one of those Enfield slugs; and it stopped him for all time. Before any one could reach the man, he had taken the long dive, through the belly trap, back to earth.

A man in the rear gondola, portside, got hit. A forward balloonette was riddled. One fuel tank was holed. The *Grottkau* dropped two more bombs, one of them with telling damage, and all hands were pretty well satisfied to ride out of that storm of lead. Honors were by no means even, but the raider had the fear of Russia put into it.

Captain Bucer, taking a little more time to size up the many things that had happened in those few minutes, made his cold entries. Lieutenant Luben furnished the name of the bomber who'd gone back to earth. Captain Bucer was very careful as to the exact, correct spelling of that bomber's name. One had to be so watchful about making one's flight reports. And for official record, the cor-

rect spelling of a dead man's name was very important. And the wounded man's name? Yes, the name of the wounded man was important too. But as for the wounded man in person—Bucer told Luben that he could not relieve that man from engine duty.

"Wrap him up, Lieutenant Luben. Paint him red and wrap him up. Every man must remain at his post. It is war, Lieutenant Luben. We must not forget that. Persons are not important."

Half after three found them coming down hard on the little junction city near the headwaters of the Volga, Rzhev. There were no troops to be seen. The railroad yards, however, offered the usual worthwhile objective. The *Grottkau,* in passing, left fires burning and railroad bridges knocked out, down there in small, cold, miserable Rzhev. By no stretch of the imagination was that target of any pressing military importance. Other Zeppelin commanders, to give them their just dues, had passed up hundreds of such points on the map. But not the flying brute, Bucer. Anything belonging to the enemy was fish in his net. He logged the bombs dropped and the damage done.

MIDWAY between the last fires left burning and Moscow lay Volokolamsk. It's small and had no place whatever in the scheme of things. Nevertheless, at four o'clock, in the freezing dusk of that Winter day, the small town received one bomb. It hit true. A score or more of poor homes burned briskly in the stiff wind. And another entry was made in the log of the *Grottkau.*

But that wasn't war; and the men aboard the raider knew as much. Most of them were men from just such small towns back in the fatherland. To them, it seemed like bringing hell to their own kind of humble people. What an act! Killing country folks. Turning others out into the cold. And the outside thermometers of the *Grottkau,* still at 5000 feet, read forty-six below.

Darkness was pretty well upon the country when the fires of burning Volokolamsk passed entirely from view. The wireless operator handed Captain Bucer another weather report from Neumünster. It was data decoded from a late afternoon Petrograd survey. Another storm was sweeping from the North Sea and east across the Baltic.

Again, as before, Herr Bucer and his wireless man were the only ones aboard the *Grottkau* who knew the text of this new radio flash. And again the captain stood there and made no remark or comment to his officers. The ship was his, and the weather was his sole affair. Was he not riding that ship just as far as they? Was he asking for quarter? Is war a soft thing, a thing dependent upon the whims of weak men and strong weather? No. At least, such was not the way with war waged by Bucer. The *Grottkau* had not made her designated patrol, and that must be realized before she turned.

The lights of stark hamlets west of Moscow came to the eyes of the Germans more and more now. And when the craft was within twenty or thirty miles of the greatest city of Russia, rifle fire from the ground once more reached, and holed, the *Grottkau.* A bullet passed through the control car at an acute angle, splintering the floor boards at Captain Bucer's left and passing through a side window and up into the ship's fabric. Into the semi-darkness the men of the *Grottkau* stared. Many sharp, keen lights were blinking down there along the railroad; and here and there the larger slashings of yellow-red fire showed where bigger pieces than rifles were making their try for the Moscow bound raider. Plain to see, the *Grottkau* was expected. And the Moscow garrison had warned troop detachments out there to the west.

Captain Bucer took the *Grottkau* away from the railroad, off a few miles to the north. He also called for more altitude. The intense cold made more

altitude possible, without dropping ballast. Soon she was at nine thousand feet; and the lights of Moscow were there to starboard. There was little use for the great city to douse those lights. Even without lights, a city of any size could be spotted down there on the blanket of snow. Snow that glistened under a billion stars. There was no moon.

Going to 9000 feet, the outside thermometers—the one just outside the control car's portside bow window, and the other on the leading-up ladder—had fallen to sixty below zero. And lower. Then, at seventy below, the first of the two drew its red tongue entirely out of the graduated tube, and burst. At seventy-three below the other thermometer did the same thing. Every man—even the iron Bucer—drew his thick fur coat a bit tighter, stood his post and tried to beat life into his freezing limbs. Man might stand a short turn of duty at that altitude, at such a temperature, but not for long.

The bombing officer was at his station, with a cold hand ready to press the button that would open the party. Crew men were aft at the cargo room's dropping chute, ready to send reading matter down to the benighted people of a strife torn city. Engine men were on the alert, with the motors already in reverse. Again the *Grottkau* was losing her great speed, and the moment of action was close at hand.

Moscow fired the first shot; and a high riding, flaming onion crossed the raider's bow. Then a man back in the hull telephoned to the control car, saying that a rear balloonette was losing hydrogen. It had been hit by rifle fire—at an elevation of 9000 feet—and, the man added, the holes (going in and coming out) are both in the sides of the balloonette.

Airplane attack!

Captain Bucer ordered all motors idled. All ears listened. Those ears caught the roar of an airplane's engine. Then the lookout atop the *Grottkau* telephoned down—

"Airplane on portside bow."

Even as the lookout spoke, the Russian plane, with her guns blinking, dived and fired into the bow of the *Grottkau.* At the same time the topside and starboard gondola machine gunners poured their fire at the diving, then zooming, plane. To get out from under the ship's fire, the Russian flyer kicked in left rudder, then lost a bit of altitude in a split-S turn. But he'd be back. So far he had failed to set the great ship afire; and that was the aim of all heavier-than-air pilots.

With her motors still idled, till they were turning hardly faster than 300 revolutions per minute, the *Grottkau* could hear the drone of that diving, turning Russian. The act of following a plane in a night sky is almost beyond the ability of the human eye; even in a moonlit or starlit sky. The men of the *Grottkau* could not see the smaller enemy. But Captain Bucer knew that the Russian flyer would have little or no trouble finding the great Zeppelin again, if he had lost sight of it in his dive, turn and climb. What's more, Captain Bucer judged that the attacker would try a climbing, zooming, underneath attack this time. And Bucer thought fast.

As noted before, the literature dropping gang was standing by at the cargo room chute. Because of the wind, and the ship's great altitude, the dropping of that light reading matter would be done fully eight or ten miles west of Moscow. Now Bucer called the officer in charge of that chute. He said:

"When the Very flares, drop your cargo. And scatter it as much as possible. Stand by and watch."

CAPTAIN BUCER, with head and shoulders far out a window, watched and listened. In his hand was a Very pistol. Up from the portside this time, and pointed directly at the *Grottkau's* midship section, came the Russian. Bucer

waited. The attacking plane was soon discernible, for its pilot was firing from long range, and the brace of bow guns was flickering. Bucer waited till the oncoming ship was within a hundred yards of its target. Soon it was only a few hundred feet away. Now the Very pistol was discharged; and a flare lighted up the sky and the *Grottkau,* bright as day. Into that calcium glare darted the Russian. His guns were spreading a burst that was circling the dropping chute, midship. Then, without warning, out came a shower of vivid, silvery stuff, falling all around the attacking pilot. That pilot, expecting any kind of new fangled death from the Germans, must have been chilled to the heart with sudden fear. It was some sort of silver death! Something, perhaps, that was destroying the very air in which he and his plane were trying to fight. It was new, different.

That Russian pilot, when his ship was within a hundred feet of the great enemy, decided that it was a good place to get away from. He must have shoved his control stick hard to the instrument board and stood on his right rudder, intending to fly another quick turn. Or maybe it was some of the literature, caught by his propeller and then whirled back into his face. That silver shower of death was with him all the way. At any rate, as the Russian plane flew its turn, with the left wings banking high, those wings hooked into a bow gondola. It was the wings that shattered. The plane went out of control. Down through the calcium glare, spinning fast, the Russian fell.

Captain Bucer made an entry in his log. Then he telephoned again, telling the droppers to drop the rest of Moscow's allotment of propaganda. Motors were signaled back to normal speed, still in the reverse, this to slow up the over-city passage of the raider. Moscow was very close now. Searchlights were beginning to sweep the sky, for the Very flare had floated far downward and flickered out.

The bombing of Moscow was merely routine. Bucer was very generous with the big city. He unloaded five tons of his bomb cargo. If the *Grottkau* made no more objectives, at least one big target had been hit. And Moscow had been hit. The great railroad yards, wide and black splotches on the white city, were easy to find. Fires were seen burning at half a dozen points before the *Grottkau* had reached the eastern edge of the metropolis. Propaganda throwaways were still going down on the wind, glistening in the light of the clear burning fires.

Five o'clock was close at hand. Captain Bucer was busy with his log entries. The navigation officer called his superior's attention to the fact that the altimeter had showed little gain, with the dropping of the great bomb load. Bucer looked hard at the dial of the altimeter. They should have shot up to a much greater altitude, what with such cold air and a much lighter ship. For the first time, the face of Bucer showed emotion.

They knew that one hydrogen container had been hit—back there on the railroad when a rifle had reached her. But that damage had been quickly repaired. Indeed, the repairing rigger had almost anticipated the shot, so fast was he in stopping the leakage. But how about the strafing received by that diving plane?

Captain Bucer and Lieutenant Luben climbed aloft. They didn't have to make a long examination. Two balloonettes, one to either side of the cargo room and dropping chute, had been hit. They'd been riddled, and little remained of the hydrogen once contained. Repair of those two containers was useless. These damaged balloonettes should have been inspected, and the damage noticed long before this.

Maybe the brute master had something of human kindness left in him, for he said little or nothing. Even Bucer knew that his few men were hard enough pressed as it was, without hav-

ing them abused now. The damage had been done. It was war. Such things will, must, happen. Back to the control car the captain and Luben made their way.

The ship had dropped more altitude during the captain's short trip aloft. Well, with her whole crew almost frozen in their tracks, a loss of altitude was to be desired. No crew of humans could last long at 9000 feet in that sub-zero air. Wonder is—and the whole crew did wonder at this—that all power units, with fuel and oil and water, hadn't frozen tight as drums. Zeppelins had had their oil and fuel supplies frozen before; and Captain Bucer certainly would have brought her lower, even if the *Grottkau* wasn't doing so of her own accord.

Within half an hour, at about the time the first full day aloft ended, the ship had dropped to 5000 feet. However, they were no longer waiting for her loss of buoyancy to bring her low. She was being flown down, motors wide and nose low. Anything to get a crew back into air that a man might stand, no colder, say, than forty or fifty below.

Bucer and the navigation officer made a time check of the *Grottkau's* passage between the eastern outskirts of Moscow and the next city to the east, Pavlovski Posad. The air-line distance was thirty-five miles. Losing altitude, giving no attention to speeding, the trip was made in just twenty minutes. That was fast. It told them that the *Grottkau* was still riding the wind. And it was a wind that was carrying them deeper and deeper into that No Man's Land of all No Man's Lands—stark, frozen Russia. A white hell!

Pavlovski Posad was just a few lights on the railroad, but it gathered unto itself one bomb. The bomb hit true enough, but there seemed to be no fires started by it. With that off his hands, Captain Bucer ordered motors reduced to a safe retarded speed. That is, down to seven or eight hundred revs per minute, a rate where they'd be sure to keep from freezing. Then all hands took on hot grub. Bucer called upon his radio man for more weather reports; and that operator reached back for the navy's station at Neumünster. It took a little time.

WHEN Neumünster flashed something worthwhile, the *Grottkau* was getting all set to bear down on Vladimir, a fair sized town of forty thousand people. Captain Bucer hardly expected trouble, but his ship was fired upon again at that point, and heavily. The town is a little better than one hundred miles from Moscow, so they'd had time to wire ahead and give the warning. So heavy was the rifle fire that the *Grottkau* was forced to drop half a dozen bombs, in place of the two intended.

With the dropping of half a dozen she took altitude, but not fast enough to get away from the ground fire. Captain Bucer was getting too much of that stuff, with far too serious results. Right away, without waiting for power to boost his altitude, he dropped water ballast. What's more, he dropped a mighty large quantity; far more than was good for the future trim of a ship that was so far behind enemy lines. By the time the raider was beyond danger from the Russians, she was back at an altitude of 8000 feet.

Again, that altitude was too cold for human endurance. It had to be dropped, and quickly. A portside motor began to spit and slow down. The engine man telephoned the control car and reported that his motormeter temperature reading was far lower than safe running heat. He was afraid that his unit was freezing tight.

With the ship much lighter now, and in that cold and heavy air, Captain Bucer knew that the big craft could hardly go down to a safe elevation on her own power without valving hydrogen. The thought of throwing her buoyant gas away was pretty close to the thought of sacrificing one's own life

blood. But it had to be done, for there was no second choice. Bucer valved off. He valved heavily. The *Grottkau* must chance no dead, frozen motors. Bad enough to have her men in that condition, to say nothing of risking the loss of power. Power. The stuff that would be necessary if they were to regain their own lines.

For the first time, after getting back to 4500 feet, Captain Bucer had an opportunity to read the last flash from Neumünster. It was all bad news. The navy air service had been forced to call off all air activities in the North Sea and Baltic. Storms were sweeping the whole of Northern Europe, and moving east on high winds that were general. The Petrograd-Tallinn-Riga area was reported storm bound, with no promise of clearing.

The *Grottkau* was eight hundred miles from her base. Petrograd was four hundred and fifty miles away, northwest. Bucer had never for a minute lost sight of that desired objective. Up till the time of reading this last report he'd hoped and planned to fly around the bad weather, turn north, then west, and make his objective, Petrograd, on the return trip. That plan had seemed logical enough. Any man willing to fly five or six hundred miles out of his way should—and ordinarily would—get out of the adverse wind that was bothering him. Bucer had flown around windstorms before.

Now, with those bad reports on the Petrograd-Tallinn-Riga area, the mission seemed doomed. Petrograd had slipped out of his hands. Worse than that, though, the storms were sneaking in on every quarter of his likely retreat. To call a spade a spade, the *Grottkau* was up against it. If a low pressure condition prevailed back in the area to the west, Captain Bucer did not want to take a hydrogen-shy ship back there.

Then again, were the *Grottkau* to turn about now and try to buck a strong wind for eight hundred miles, her fuel might not last. Taking it at face value, and without kidding oneself, that westward return was just about out of the question.

Captain Bucer had one out. He might turn south, fly eight hundred miles to the Black Sea, then west some five hundred miles to the German lighter-than-air base at Jamboli, Bulgaria. If the west wind fell off as he went along, he might do even better, fly a more direct route, and cut the bee-line distance down to about one thousand two hundred miles.

He ordered his radio operator to get the Jamboli station. No answer seemed to be coming from Jamboli. Meanwhile the *Grottkau* was cruising eastward, keeping well away from the railroad.

Captain Bucer ordered the operator to try the call of the airship station at Temesvar, Hungary. Anything to get a report from the south. Temesvar didn't answer its call. Then a try was made for the legation station at Constantinople, but without results.

Switching back to the Neumünster call, the operator brought in that station again. Neumünster was far behind on Balkan weather. It did report, however, that last flashes from Jamboli, nearly fifteen hours earlier, gave the weather as partly clouds over the Black Sea, with limited visibility and occasional rains. Fifteen hours ago? Not so good for the *Grottkau*. Lots can happen in fifteen hours.

While all that wireless work was under way, the *Grottkau* cruised closer and closer to Nijni Novgorod, one of the Volga's big cities, with 185,000 souls. It was an important inland port and rail center. Not a bad target for a few of the remaining German bombs. It could also handle some of the reading matter, for Nijni Novgorod had any number of people who could read.

Captain Bucer, however, decided to attack this city by a line of flight other than that marked out by the railroad's direction. He was sort of fed up on railroading. So he swung some miles north, intending to come down the

Volga. Moscow, it seems, had let this big city on the Volga know all about the raider; and the big city was awake and waiting.

Searchlights cut the night, even when the *Grottkau* was all of fifteen miles away. And the Russians were firing rifles, light field pieces and mortars before the oncoming ship was anywhere within range.

The *Grottkau* made the northwest outskirts of the city, flying at 5000 feet. Captain Bucer was bruting it through, for he could not afford the dropping of any more water or fuel, which would be necessary if the ship had to win quick altitude. Drop fuel or water now, and she'd go light. Then drop several hundredweight of bombs and reading matter, and she'd go lighter still. And they'd have to get down out of the cold as soon as the city had been put behind. Light ship, heavy valving. No! The *Grottkau* must carry on at her present altitude, run the gantlet and call the bluff of those wild-shooting Volga groundlings.

They say that the Russians who fired on the *Grottkau* there at Nijni Novgorod were only green troops of the Kazan-Yaroslavl area. Training troops or not, they were good. They gave the long, silver raider as tough a reception as any Zeppelin ever suffered. One of their searchlights framed the *Grottkau* while it was still two or three miles from the edge of town. From that second till the German passed into the east the sky was slugged with rifle fire and whatnot.

In order to get from above that upturned hell, Captain Bucer signaled for a quick dropping of both bombs and propaganda. The last mentioned cargo went by the board with all haste, the droppers caring not at all whether anybody ever read the stuff. But the bombs, while dropped with speed, were also dropped with German precision and effect.

There were fires burning all along the riverfront when it was over.

BUT the *Grottkau* had been hit harder than usual. She took no new altitude when she should have won much. This time, however, Captain Bucer did not have to go aloft to learn what was holding his ship low. Luben was already up on the catwalk. He telephoned down that a light shell had torn its way completely through one of the aft balloonettes. It was a big hole, Luben said. It had been a lucky shot—lucky for the *Grottkau* that the shot's nose had not contacted anything more solid than a balloonette. It was a close call!

Having quit the railroad with the passing of Nijni Novgorod, Herr Bucer now followed the Volga's valley. It took the ship a little more to the south. But the *Grottkau* was dragging low. Holding altitude was no longer one of her properties. The last of the water ballast had been dropped. The bomb load and the reading matter were all gone. Only the hellish cold night remained full strength, with never a sign of a let-up. Again, while the ship loafed before the wind, Bucer pressed his radio operator to reach out and learn what there was to be learned about the weather to the southeast. The Balkans were his only hope now, and the *Grottkau* was really on that course already. As before, there seemed to be no way of reaching those distant southern stations..

When the *Grottkau* came down on the river town of Liskovo, fifty miles east of the last big objective, Captain Bucer gave the place lots of room. He wanted no more surprises. Not this flight.

At ten o'clock the ship had dropped to the 2000-foot level; and it was going to go lower. For the first time Captain Bucer went into a huddle with his officers. They agreed that the *Grottkau* was pretty well up against it, so Captain Bucer sized the thing up for them, then made known his final plan. Of nineteen officers and men, he reminded them, he had lost two: one who jumped off the topside and the man who was shot from the ground and went through the

belly trap. Of the others remaining, five men had been shot, or injured during the fire aboard. One of these, the sick man that Luben wanted to land earlier in the flight, was now raving in delirium. The other, the one whom Bucer had told Luben to "wrap up and paint red" was unconscious.

"So," Captain Bucer said, "the *Grottkau,* counting off two sick, now has a crew of fifteen men. I believe that a crew of five men can handle her. That will leave a navigation officer and one other man on the controls. One man can keep watch, after a fashion, on all six motors. Then there will be one topside man to act as machine gunner and lookout. The fifth man will be the wireless operator."

Having said that, Captain Bucer told his officers that he proposed landing the *Grottkau,* dropping all but five men, then heading her for the Balkans. The weight of the men landed, he reminded them, would lighten the ship by some eighteen or nineteen hundred pounds. With that weight gone, the *Grottkau* had a fighting chance. On the other hand, if the *Grottkau* continued to carry her present load, she had no chance.

"But, sir," Lieutenant Luben protested, "we can not drop our five sick, burned and wounded men out here to die."

"Lieutenant Luben, the *Grottkau* is our only concern," Captain Bucer said. "The men dropped and left behind might not survive. It is very doubtful whether or not Russia will allow them to live. As you know, bombers are unloved by all peoples. However, if these men die, it will be for the Fatherland. If the *Grottkau* lives, these men will have died well. Is it not so?"

His officers agreed that it was so. But down in their hearts they had little or no room for the brute who would set sick men down in the Russian snow to die. There are limits even to war; and this thing was the limit. Easy enough for a man who was safe to say that it was well for other men to die for the Fatherland. Easy for fat Captain Bucer to live and know that he was beyond the orders of any one who could put him in a like position. Brute. Bucer!

"Lieutenant Luben," Captain Bucer finally said, "you will talk to each of the crewmen. Have them draw lots to see which one of the engineers is to remain. In like manner, draw one man for the platform. As for the wireless man, he must remain. I will place a slip for each of you officers in my hat; then draw. Two officers will handle the car."

At ten o'clock the *Grottkau* was nearing the place where the Vetluga joins the Volga. At the present low altitude, the territory at the confluence of the tightly frozen rivers was as bright as day. The Vetluga comes down from the north; and the Volga swings a bit in that direction to meet it. The ages have thrown up a pretty high bank on the west side of the joining. It was in the lee of this high bank that Captain Bucer decided a landing might be made. Swinging around, and dropping the *Grottkau's* bow, he felt his way down for a landing.

The rivers are wide; and for a great distance the ship droned along only a few feet above the ice. Satisfied that the setdown could be made, Captain Bucer again called for power; and then flew another wide turn of the territory. While the wide turn was being made, all hands, with the exception of engine men, were called to the control car. They were ordered to stand by and be ready to drop to the ice; a landing drill in which all Zeppelin crews were schooled. Each man had his few belongings, blanket, food and souvenir whatnots that a man will still retain even after being told to lighten ship. There was no display of emotion among these men who, perhaps, were about to die. The two sick men were stretched on the floor, waiting to be lifted out. They were still beyond the cares of that cold world.

The ship fell below the high bank far ahead. There seemed to be little headwind now. Captain Bucer fired a Very

pistol. He knew his first bit of joy in many hours; behind the bank the air was quiet. Up into the lee of that bank the *Grottkau* eased her bow. Closer she came to that west side of the Vetluga. And nearer and nearer to the ice. Now all spare hands—including the large Captain Bucer—had climbed out through windows and doors, and were half hanging from fittings and the grab-rail of the control car.

Less than ten feet of space remained under the car's bottom. Then the word came to drop. They all dropped; then made a quick grab for the rail, as the least bit of hydrogen was valved off to hold her there. The great ship dragged a little, but they were able to handle her. The sick men were unloaded, Bucer, there on the ice, took care of each small detail.

Nobody remained aboard now but the wireless operator and a man in each power gondola. Those engine men had their units throttled very low. Captain Bucer could make himself heard, and understood, above the purr of the motors.

He told the six engine men that they would remain at their stations till he gave the word to clear ship. Then those men would crack their throttles to three-quarter speed, and drop. Five of them would drop, and one would go with the *Grottkau*.

Talking to his officers, the captain said that the next landing of the *Grottkau* would call for all that five men had of ability. The controls could be handled by two. But the six motors presented a problem; the radio man could be broken in on the flight south. He could handle one throttle when the time came to set the *Grottkau* down for the last time—wherever and whenever that might be. With three motors under human hands, the ship should handle safely enough.

Captain Bucer stood there facing his four officers: Luben, first in command; Miller, second officer; Kultz, the navigator; Amberg, the bomber. All four of them still hung to the grab-rail as they awaited their orders.

"Lieutenant Kultz," the captain finally said, "you, like the wireless man, are indispensable. You will do the navigating.

"And you, Lieutenants," he said to the others, still with no signs of emotion. "I told you that I would draw lots for the officers. I stay behind. Lieutenant Luben, you will be in command. Fly as directly as you can to Jamboli. That is all. Aboard, Lieutenants Luben and Kultz! Engineers, attention! Open throttles—drop!"

Luben was at the wheel. Kultz was at the elevators. The wireless man was there at a window. One engine man alone remained in a gondola. The fifth man, the topside outlook and gunner, was still hanging to the rail as the six motors barked into action and the *Grottkau* elevated. Five tumbling engine men picked themselves up from the river's ice. And the brute master saluted his rising ship.

There had not been time to talk. No time to question the captain's last orders. No time even for Lieutenant Luben to protest.

The brute master had nobody there in Russia to tell him that he must face death in that unfriendly country; but the brute master seemed to be big enough to do his own telling. And fifteen men knew that Captain Carl Bucer did not draw the decision from his hat.

As for the *Grottkau*, she made her way to a water landing on the Black Sea. She was towed into Varna, Bulgaria, from the place she landed, about one hundred miles off Sevastopol, Crimea.

And as for the brute master and his twelve men, many stories have been told. None of those stories, however, seems to have been officially checked. Nothing is really known of the fate that befell Captain Bucer and the heroic little group who faced the cold Russian night with him.

How the Commodore GOT HIS NAME

By A. L. SPELLMEYER

THE Hashknife wagon and its trail worn crew of '79 had crossed the Picketwire and its shallow trickling waters, to scatter the cattle in the sheltered cedar brakes; and, returning, found the creek a stormy river. It was only a few miles to the Mormon settlement of Holbrook and the delights of certain cantinas, yet it was plain to see that no horse or man could swim that hell of boiling water.

All but one man returned to the chuck wagon and started to make camp. This man, who had stated his name was Owens when he joined the trailing outfit near the Oklahoma border, was in the prime of life, tall and straight. He wore his hair long, like Wild Bill Hickok—the only man to whom his gun speed was ever compared by old-timers—and two guns were slung low on his thighs and tied down.

Owens searched that half mile of mad water and the near bank with his keen, cold eyes. He then uncoiled his saddle rope and threw it over a short drift log, and hauled it to the bank. After gathering several logs, he returned to the wagon, unsaddled his horse and threw the hull into the wagon. Taking an extra rope, he returned to his logs and lashed them into a crude raft.

The Hashknife crew were not timid, for they had survived the Chisholm trail and others before it. Most of them had been suckled in the Comanche fighting land, weaned on hardship and educated in Abilene; but they tried to persuade Owens to give up his attempts to cross the raging torrent on a raft. It had no effect, for Owens would not be beaten by outlaw horse, man or flood.

After securing a long, stout pole Owens shoved off into the river, and the Hashknife men scattered along the bank to throw him a rope; it seemed impossible that anything could survive that wild water and débris.

As the current caught the raft it was whirled and swamped. Only the instant reaction of the bronc rider to give with it, and balance, saved Owens. Bobbing and lunging, the raft took the current and then his eye and hand joined to fend off the great trees and floating limbs. The men along the bank were forced to run their horses to keep even with the racing raft, but they were now too distant to help Owens with a rope. They returned to camp with the certainty it was the last they would ever see of him.

Battling against the current with mighty thrusts of the pole, he was making progress toward the far bank. The problem now was to evade a crushing blow of tree or rock, and to maintain his physical stamina during the exertion.

In an eddy five miles below and almost opposite the adobe cantina of the Holbrook hamlet, Owens finally made the bank. Wet, weary and bruised, he had beaten the flood.

Thereafter the Hashknife hellions called Owens the "Commodore of the Picketwire," and as Commodore Owens he made his fame as a marshal whose gun was not beaten in two decades. His name spread as being poison with a gun, and those who doubted it met their fate.

Neither Billy the Kid, Black Jack, nor other outlaws in their most reckless tours spilled over the edge of the district ruled by the Commodore. They did not crave his game.

A Story of the West Indies

The SHADOW ON UP ROCK

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

ANGUS MANNING, the coffee and pimento planter from Dupree Island, sat upon the worn lounge in the American Consulate at Atengo, too distressed to ask another question. Consul Johnny Roney hoped that he wouldn't. Manning had no idea that the other American present was Givens, a Department of Justice operative down in the West Indies on some clue to the missing loot of a hundred-thousand-dollar mail car robbery out in Kansas. A matter some four years old—but Uncle Sam has a long arm for jobs of that sort.

Consul Roney was bound to aid the Secret Service man all he could. Givens was supposed to be representing a motion picture distributing agency, but any one else, save a soul as simple and kindly as the Dupree Island planter, might have wondered why a wretched shack, such as the Queen's Cinema here at Atengo, should draw the interest of a mighty Hollywood corporation.

Johnny stared out at the empty Caribbean from his musty office, feeling very self-conscious—not at all the way a good detective should feel. But then Johnny wasn't a dick. Givens' highly professional manner irritated him; and the consul had been a weekend guest too many times at Manning's place, Up Rock House, not to feel embarrassed by Givens' mission. It was tragic that Manning had dropped in on this conference between the consul and the man from Washington. But Manning had come in a queer agitation, not at all his usual cheery self. Roney noticed that before a word had been said.

Givens should never have made that apparently idle remark about young Robert Sherrod, who had won his way to the managership of Manning's business. It seemed to have opened the gates to a secret bewilderment in the planter's mind—and all the Out Islands knew that Sherrod was going to marry Nelita Manning, old Angus' only child, undoubtedly the richest heiress from Trinidad to Jamaica as colonial folk go.

Manning dabbed his pink brow with a handkerchief—he kept out of the sun as white islanders do—and turned to Givens. The Federal detective had a

stolid, heavy footed way about him, which Johnny Roney thought was just the way a dick should be—but then Johnny had been down the islands so long that he really was as unsophisticated as Angus Manning.

"But, Givens, if you even imagine you could furnish any clue to Robbie, you ought to help. You said you thought you'd seen him somewhere in the States—and that's important."

Givens' gray eyes flickered to Johnny.

"Help? Sure I would. But get this straight—I haven't said a word against the young fella. What I said was that he resembled a man I'd seen somewhere. I might be wrong—it's nothing to get excited about."

"Yes, but where? Who?" The planter leaned forward eagerly.

Consul Roney interposed; he knew what Givens meant. But this was a rotten affair, if Givens were right.

"But, Manning, Robbie Sherrod is a swell chap! With you four years, and the most valuable man on Dupree. Givens didn't mean any insinuation about Sherrod. No mystery at all."

Planter Manning's worried eyes were fixed on Dupree Island out the consulate windows. Roney could see the dim gold and pink glimmer from his desk. Forty miles away, out from the drab flat rings of Atengo's encircling coral, Dupree flung its twin peaks three thousand feet up from deep water. Dupree Island should have been the entry port, but the Mannings owned it all, from the one high valley, where old Angus raised the priceless coffee, sold privately to Mayfair tables, to the lower slopes whose pimento groves furnished the best spice of the West Indies. The Manning brand meant quality, as the Manning name meant colonial tradition.

The Yankee consul was thinking of Nelita Manning—the half Scotch, half Spanish girl who was to marry an American adventurer . . . And now this postal detective from the States had hinted something about Sherrod which made Roney wince.

Then Manning's voice continued:

"Nel's having tea with the Resident's wife. And Robbie won't join us till the cargo's stowed. That's the lad, Mr.

Givens—your Yankee way—business first."

He wanted to praise Sherrod. Manning was a sentimental survivor of some impossible feudal golden age, dreaming life away with his girl child, his breed cattle and choice crops, his four hundred contented black workers on his Eden-like isle. But his next words betrayed a touch of dour Scotch stubbornness.

"But I must know about this, Mr. Givens—you thinking you'd seen Robbie back home. Robbie—poor lad, poor lad!"

Roney glanced sharply at Manning. Down the waterside, on the customs wharf, Sherrod's white sun helmet bobbed briskly about among the black men. And suddenly Manning broke out harshly.

"He's to marry my girl—and, gentlemen, I'm groping after shadows! Givens has brought the first clue—the first hope. I've a blind faith he can help the lad find his lost identity!"

Roney stared blankly at the planter. Givens hardly stirred—his silence seemed significant. Roney hurried to cover it.

"My dear Manning! What can you mean?"

The planter tried to appear casual in reply.

"Oh, amnesia, of course. As Sherrod is an American, I should have come to the consulate long ago, I fancy. But we respected his secret. Fact is, Roney, all we know of Robert is his name—and that's all he knows of himself, his former life in America. Devilish fine lad, Robbie—but now, marrying into the family is something else."

Consul Johnny winced. If Givens, the Washington man, were right, it was decidedly something else. Johnny remembered many pleasant weekends at Up Rock House, but still there had been a queer constraint. Nel Manning's gaiety a bit forced; Sherrod contriving to avoid the consul's company. Johnny glanced at Givens; the Department of Justice agent showed no surprise at the plight of this lost adventurer. Well—then he had known it, perhaps, before he was told.

Manning laughed ruefully.

"Amnesia—common medical case, I know. But we're responsible for it, gentlemen. Sherrod's whole tragedy dates from the hour, some four years ago, when my daughter ran him down with her car just outside the gates of her private school up the Hudson. She rushed him to a hospital, and the chap was unconscious for weeks. Skull fracture, they said. Well, we did everything possible—specialists and all that.

"Sherrod might have held us for heavy damages; but when he recovered his memory was gone. You'll understand how horribly guilty Nelita felt. The physicians said that with a new environment and care the lad would likely recover his past, so Nel sent him down here to me. More than four years, now, and Robert's made his place splendidly in the business. Damned plucky, I say—walking through the shadows with a smile. His share of profits is a good five thousand pounds—and I love him like a son."

There was a silence which Givens' heavy voice ended.

"The young fella must have had something on him—cards or letters—that should have identified him, you'd think."

Manning laughed forcedly and threw up his hands.

"Not a thing. That was a bit queer, I'll admit. I wasn't in the States then, but Nel sought every clue to help him. Sherrod knew his own name—but nothing else."

"His name," Givens rumbled slowly. "Your girl took his word for it. Nothing on him to prove it—sure it was queer."

Manning covered his distress by swinging to his feet.

"I say, Roney, you and Givens come over to Up Rock this weekend. Talk to Sherrod—see if we can't help the lad."

WHEN the planter had gone to the club, Roney turned to Givens, who had stepped to the veranda from which one could see along the waterside to the customs wharf. Across from its warehouse was the heavy shade of Queen's Square, and at a corner of this the decrepit gray building which was the cinema house of Atengo. For three nights, after each steamer day, motion pictures, making the islands' circuit, were shown there. Now the Federal man was watching the empty, shabby entrance. The Atengo operator of the films, Nick Varelos, a slight yellowish man, Greek or Latin halfbreed, stood there with Robert Sherrod.

Givens pointed.

"Is Sherrod a friend of the movie man?"

Roney shrugged.

"Hardly. Varelos isn't quite the sort. Not that any one has anything against him—or knows about him. I believe he's a naturalized American—claims he's been a newsreel cameraman in the States. Landed here a derelict a year or so back, and now he's our picture man. What about it?"

The detective had an irritating way of ignoring queries. He put a heavy hand on the consul's desk.

"I understand he gives a show at Manning's island once a week?"

"He goes over to Dupree with his program after it's run here. Manning pays all expenses, and it's a free show for his people. I suppose Sherrod makes the arrangements. So you've met Varelos, eh? Rather a mystery man, also, possibly?"

Givens' face was a mask.

"Coming here as the field agent for a motion picture agency, of course I went to Varelos. Have to show some interest in his business, you understand."

"Oh, naturally."

Roney grumbled as he crossed the street with Givens:

"Wish you'd be more explicit. Are you really hooking Bob Sherrod up with that ancient mail car robbery out in the Middle West back home?"

"I didn't say so, brother. But suppose a smooth bird was going to marry a nice rich girl—had wormed his way into the old man's confidence, handling his money—pretty soft, eh?"

"Givens, it'd be rotten. If you know anything of Sherrod's past, and he's not—not the right sort, we've got to stop this."

Givens' broad face relaxed in a smile.

"Leave it to me, brother. Maybe I can hand this guy a jolt that'll restore his lost memory. But, Mr. Consul, you must follow my play, see?"

"Oh, certainly."

Roney was fed up on this "brother" business; this was the third time Givens had addressed him that way.

"Givens, if you're right and Sherrod is—was—a crook, couldn't he be sent away quietly? No disclosures—no gossip?"

"That's my idea; but I ain't said he's a crook—yet."

"Damn it, you might just as well! And lost his identity; Nel Manning loves him. It's a tragic mess at best."

Manning talked trade and planting with Givens over a long drink while Johnny packed a weekend bag. Then, in the bar, the consul met young Sherrod idling, but perhaps listening acutely to the voices from the veranda. Sherrod's lean brown face had a faint smile.

Just ran in for a drink—would Roney join him?—no time for lunch—a lot of stuff to be loaded . . .

Johnny let him buy the drink.

"I suppose you know that Mr. Givens and I are going over to Dupree with you tonight?"

Sherrod's gray eyes narrowed.

"Oh—Givens? Well, that's decent of Manning. Your guest'll see something else than this banana shipping hole." Robert hurried on, curiously losing his habitual reserve, as a man might who must suddenly change pace at the brink of an abyss. As if some menacing gleam in the dark showed his false foothold.

He stammered on, "Yes, and Dupree is beautiful, of course. Two islands like these, and so different. But a Yank does get fed up, sometimes. But work and friends make it all right."

Roney leaned toward him on the bar.

"Sherrod, you're the luckiest man alive. They're grand people."

"Yes. I never dreamed such people as the Mannings existed before—" He halted, staring full at Roney.

"No? Not since—" Johnny drew his breath and took the chance. He wanted to see how Sherrod would react. "Old chap, Manning told me of your trouble. Now, you can't blame him—you're marrying into his family."

Sherrod watched him quietly, but he was quivering in every nerve. Then he blurted like a man uncertain of his speech.

"Yes, I understand, Mr. Roney. You, the consul from home—why should I blame Manning?"

The consul nodded gravely.

"Sherrod, do you think it's quite fair? You marrying Nel Manning—a man in your shape?"

Sherrod leaned over the bar, dropping his head to his hands. Then he moaned:

"O, God, I'm glad you know! That's the trouble! Who am I? Who *was* I? Man, you don't know the hell I've lived for four years!"

"You recall nothing of your past life before Nel's car struck you on that New York road? Quick, Sherrod! How is it you hadn't the least scrap of paper that might have identified you? Wasn't that queer? Hard to explain—believe?"

Sherrod gulped. Then his eyes hardened, a cold menace rode in them; then he relaxed wearily.

"I know it—I can't explain it. I've gone over it a thousand times. There at Up Rock House in the peace and sunshine—this thing's like a gray shadow behind me, reaching for me."

"And you let it reach Up Rock House, and the people who've done everything for you. See here, man—do the decent thing. Cut it all—drop out of their lives as soon as you can!"

Sherrod was gripping his control, it seemed.

"But I've won my place. Manning trusts me with everything—money, accounts—"

"That's the point. And that girl—Say, Sherrod, for your own good, break away. You fear something. You don't know what it is, perhaps, but you're afraid."

Sherrod had turned his head as if listening again to Givens and Manning on the veranda. When Roney saw his face once more, it had twisted to hard stubbornness.

"Roney," he muttered, "you stay out of this, damn you! I've a right to live—to success—everything. Now you question it—"

"I've a right to question it. You admit you don't know who you are. You've no friends here, really. You keep aloof from people except the Mannings. And that bird Varelos. Come to think of it, Varelos is a mystery man himself. A bad lot, I say—and you're thick with him."

Sherrod's hard eyes widened.

"Varelos, my friend? What the devil are you driving at? I go to Nick to arrange about the pictures for Manning's show at Dupree, that's all."

Roney could say no more. The steward summoned them to Angus Manning's table. But Sherrod turned swiftly to the yard. His white helmet gleamed in the noon glare among his black men at the dock.

THE consul evaded Givens' grim smile at luncheon. Manning apologized for Sherrod's absence—invoices, a lot to do if the boat got away at five o'clock. The planter wanted to defend Sherrod. Plainly he loved the lost adventurer like a son. Johnny sighed hopelessly; this was going to be rotten, waiting for Givens' next move.

The two Americans were alone when a telephone call took Manning from the

table. Givens leaned forward with a grin.

"Well, brother, you talked with the bird. Do you think his mental fog is lifting?"

"Oh, damn it all! Yes, I think so. He doesn't like you. He must have some throwback to his past—a struggle—and he doesn't like it. He fears, and doesn't know what he fears, I'd say."

"Suits me, Mr. Consul. When I lay my hand on him he'll come along. Quietly, just as you want. It'll be a queer jolt when I prove to Sherrod that he's really Sherrill, and J. H. Sherrill was the mail clerk who was the inside man with the gang that stuck up a train at Marvin, Kansas. A hundred thousand dollars' loot was never recovered, and this man Sherrod'll have to tell where it's cached."

"But he's forgotten! All that is lost to his mind."

"It's my job to make him remember. The three Marvin bandits doin' long stretches won't say where that stuff went, but this inside worker could—when he's jolted to his senses. Leave it to me, brother. You want to protect your friends and this nice island girl, don't you?"

Roney nodded. He'd liked Sherrod. Sherrod was one of the alert, clean-cut Americans one is proud of abroad. But damn Sherrod—he had to be got rid of quietly, decently.

"All right," the consul muttered. "But let's drop this wretched business over the weekend. Here's Manning now. Not a well man, Givens—can't stand any smash, gossip, notoriety."

Roney left them, to clean up his desk at the consulate. He was back at the club, bathed and ready, when the Resident's carriage brought Nelita Manning to the drive. Pink hat and white gown, brown hair blowing in the trade wind and her blue eyes flashing mischief. Johnny's retorting banter died on his lips. A happy kid, alone over there on the bit of Eden her father had created.

"Dad phoned me that you were coming to Up Rock. After neglecting us for months? Don't you like us hermits over there?"

"Neglect you? Bless you, I'm a busy man!"

"It seems so. But why this Sunday?" She eyed him quizzically. "But I suppose it's your friend, Mr. Givens, the cinema expert. A bit difficult to entertain, eh?"

Roney grumbled.

"Oh, I draw all sorts. But, Nel, don't be rude to the chap. You can be unbearable when you want to."

Her eyes were a ruthless blue flash; then she laughed.

"Come on. Every one's waiting. Robbie's got his cargo lashed."

Manning's little tradeboat worked out through Atengo reefs with the three older men under the aft awning. Nelita scrambled over the cabin, across the canvas covered cargo to the tiny foredeck where Sherrod had stood ever since his blacks shoved away.

The planter made a gesture of troubled pride. The pink-blue bulk of his mountain isle floated in the level sun. The green flats of Atengo glimmered behind the coral breaker lines, faded out. The stars came on, and still the two young people sat forward as if this were their world alone, its beauty, its peace, its strength.

The talk aft died away. When the boat cleared a jungle clad headland, and a little string of lights bobbed over the sea, Manning turned to the others.

"Deep water to dockside, Mr. Givens. Not many spots like it."

"Yeah—fine little harbor. Got your own power plant, hey?" Givens eyed the bulge of palm tops above the white beach, the few native dugouts on the sands in the flicker of lights. "But how'd a man get away from your island—say, in a hurry?"

"Get away? In an emergency I'd send him in the launch. But the tradeboat, and then the *Islander,* leave every Tuesday."

The planter was puzzled; he owned

the *Islander* also. Givens said no more, but Roney saw he understood. No man could leave Dupree against Manning's wishes. Givens must think that Sherrod would seek escape once the truth about himself was crashed home to his mind. But would he admit it and go quietly, without scandal?

The boat came to the wharf, and shouting black men made fast the lines. Manning's car was beyond the warehouse. At the clang of the opening doors the planter started to protest.

"Don't mind the stuff tonight, Robbie. The car's waiting."

"And a bit of squall isn't. I'll see it stored, sir, and be up later."

Sherrod turned to Manning's girl, and Nel interposed.

"Let him be, dad—you know he'd rather have things fit."

So Sherrod stayed with his black dockmen. The car swung from the flat lands about the port village to the first uplands. Nel at the wheel, by Roney's side, and the two older men behind. The consul knew Sherrod had stayed for a night's job because he didn't fancy Givens. Was Givens some memory of his lost years?

THE white road climbed toward the twin mountains. Roney could remember when this was all jungle and rough trails. Sherrod had built the roads, cleaned the ditches, whitewashed the village huts . . . Givens was listening to Manning tell of it when the car rushed through the coffee terraces under the banana leaves—and there was Up Rock House with its flower beds and lawns. Miles away and two thousand feet below, the sea glinted in the moonlight. Givens nudged Roney as they crossed the drive.

"Understand Manning is the magistrate here, also. That right?"

"All Manning's show—topside, bottomside. But Dupree hasn't sent a man—white or black—over to Atengo jail since I can remember."

The Washington man looked narrowly along the flowered terraces, the stone façades of the great house. Manning clapped his hands for the houseboys. But Givens held his handbag back. Roney reflected that a hardboiled dick, likely come up from flatfooting the pavements, wouldn't have social graces for this old world spot which the Mannings had gemmed in exotic settings. Then, again, Givens might have official papers not to be entrusted to any one.

Manning led the way to his sideboard; the hour was late, but there'd be a nightcap. Nelita flashed the three men a smile as she lingered at the hall door. Givens held his tall glass of pimento dram—the choicest spiced rum—to eye it critically, but Roney saw the side shift of his eyes in the great mirror above the mahogany sideboard. The man from the States was watching Nelita Manning closely. Then Givens chuckled ingratiatingly.

"Must be quiet here for a girl who's lived in New York. A man could live up this mountain and be forgotten, couldn't he now?"

"And die here," retorted Manning's girl, "and never be heard of, Mr. Givens."

Then she was gone to the wide stairs. Manning laughed confusedly, and then showed Givens to his room above. Like Roney's, it opened to the broad upper veranda. The consul stretched before his own door on a cushioned lounge for his last pipe.

"Going to be a rotten time. Manning, poor old chap, hoping that Givens can help him—and help Sherrod."

Johnny was trying to detest Sherrod, and Sherrod's gallant smile haunted him. He tapped out his pipe when he saw a car's lights down the winding road.

A white figure came below the veranda, slipped through silvered palm and hibiscus clumps, stood in the full moonlight of the road. Manning's girl, waiting for the man she loved.

The little car stopped in the deep

shadow of the thatched shed beyond the terrace gardens, the picturesque little theater of grass walls and poles in which Varelos, the Atengo picture operator, showed his ancient romances and newsreels on the nights when the *Islander* came to port. From all Dupree white and black folks came as Manning's guests for this fortnightly glimpse of the great world beyond the empty Caribbean.

Sherrod joined the girl. Their white clothes blended, vanished under the palm roofed marquee. Roney yawned and went to bed. But a slight noise drew him to his veranda door. Givens stood before his own, pajama clad, watching the long white road.

"Spying on 'em—the serpent in Eden," growled Roney. "Well, I suppose it's necessary—only I hope Givens' job is done decently. Save the Mannings open humiliation. Sherrod should see it that way."

Somehow he thought Nel Manning would not be hit as hard as big Angus. His name would be gossip in all the little clubs of little ports where men remember things so long.

Roney fell into troubled sleep and slept so late that he was awakened by the black people singing to the tunes of their old organ in the wattled church back of the field hands' quarters.

He had Sunday breakfast alone. The houseboys said that Manning had taken Givens for a turn through the coffee drying platforms a mile distant. But Nelita came galloping in presently, booted as smartly as if from a Long Island bridle path and not a West Indian hill trail. She sat on the veranda rail, cracked her crop across her knee and eyed Consul Johnny alertly.

"Robbie up yet? He always sleeps late after boat nights."

"Haven't seen him. Yes, there he is in the breakfast room."

She arose, then turned abruptly back to the consul.

"Mr. Roney, dad told you about Robbie, didn't he?"

"Oh—" Johnny was uncomfortable—"that distressing story about his accident? Yes, I know now."

"Plucky, don't you think? Took up the broken end of his life and went ahead. He's made this place over while he fought that battle. But we never talk of it. Some day he'll come back to his real self, the doctors said. Might be years—but who cares? I've read of those cases. A sudden shock might do it."

"Shock? Oh, yes. Amnesia, and all that. But did you ever think that some chaps might be—be happier if they didn't remember?"

Manning's girl watched him keenly. Roney floundered on:

"I say, Nel, why not wait a bit? Why not leave this to your father—I mean your wedding and all."

"Dad? The poor old dear is a child! And I'm going to marry Robert. He needs me desperately. Who cares if he never can remember who he was? Even his name—maybe it's something else. Sherrod might be just one he picked in his weeks and weeks of delirium. And of course you'll keep our secret."

She went to the breakfast room. Roney saw her pouring coffee, and Sherrod, tousle headed, sleepy eyed, looking up with his contagious smile. Once he laughed as she turned away—and then shadows flicked across his face. When Manning's girl was not by his side, Robert Sherrod reverted to his inner dark.

JOHNNY RONEY couldn't go it; he went out testily to join Manning and Givens when they drove in. The long West Indian Sunday droned its lethargic hours away. A drink or so, a capital dinner, a smoke and talk, and then people drifting away to cool, darkened rooms for the siesta.

When Johnny came down at five o'clock, he discovered Givens in the dining room. The Washington man was concocting a drink. It was all right

for a house guest to drink alone if he wished, but Givens was inspecting the massive carving of the buffet, the ancient mirrors, then the great, beamed room. When he saw the consul, he grinned.

"Runs into money, all this, don't it? Old Manning would hate to have the Sherrod case opened up, wouldn't he?"

"Naturally. But what do you mean?" Givens was speculative.

"I've been workin' on Sherrod a bit and gettin' nowhere. He sidesteps me, brother. Now, he's out, all right—absolutely. His mind is a blank back of that motor smash. But me bein' here calls up something—just a little ghost maybe. Do you get it that way?"

"Yes. Did he ever see you in the States?"

"I can't say. I didn't work on that Marvin mail car job. It wasn't till a tip came—and I'm not sayin' where from—that I was put on Sherrod's trail. He's the bird who should know where that missin' hundred thousand dollars, cash and bonds, was cached."

"And he's forgotten it. Good Lord, man, can't you see?"

"Sure—but that don't help him. My job is to break through this—shadow. But I'm givin' him one more chance on his own."

Roney couldn't ask more. Manning was sauntering in. His kindly face beamed; the peace of his home had put away his fears for the time. He was the courteous host the evening through—the cold meats and salads of the Sunday supper, as British as the exiles could make it. Nel Manning presided. She was laughing, merry; and even Sherrod's mood lifted. Usually, when Givens was near, Sherrod relapsed into a strained silence.

Angus Manning got to talking about Sherrod. It was two years ago that a black woman, before childbirth, was seized with some frightful illness, and there was need of the doctor's care at Atengo. The hurricane month was on, but Sherrod took four Dupree Island boatmen and steered a way there. The craft struck Atengo reefs, but Sherrod got all the frightened blacks to Money Piece Rock, and then swam the last channel. The woman was saved. And now, Manning concluded, there was but one thing that would ever cause the field hands to rebel and have the King's Writ in among them, and that would be threatened harm to Robert Sherrod.

Innocently enough told, but Roney saw Nel Manning watching Givens' unstirred face—triumphantly—while Sherrod smiled in deprecation. But Roney was miserable—there would be an unhappy end to all this. Givens was implacable—but then Givens was right. Sherrod must be driven out.

Yet the last thing Roney remembered that night was the light of Nel Manning's smile turning to ruthless steel when she bade Givens good night, along with the other men. Johnny was glad when he was alone in his room. Another day of this must be endured.

He was at his usual last late pipe on the upper veranda long after Up Rock House was dark and quiet. The moon struck the sea and lowlands when it cleared the twin peaks beyond the valley fields. Then Roney knew that Givens was by his chair.

"Come on out to that little Summer house, Mr. Consul. Our bird is waitin' for us. I put a little pressure on him and he came. We'll work on this shadow business, eh?"

"Why the devil do you drag me in?" Roney got up angrily.

But he went softly after the detective, down the stairs, across the lawn to the vine and lattice pavilion by the tennis courts.

Sherrod sat there, shirt loose at his throat, arms folded. The checkered moonlight was on the faces of the three men.

"I brought the consul because he's a Government man, too," began Givens. "Now, Mr. Roney, listen to what he says. I tell him openly that his name is Sherrill—that he was a mail car clerk

and was there on the job when that car was dynamited at Marvin, Kansas, five years ago this August. The bandits who pulled the job got away, and the other clerk was killed. But it was an inside job, and Sherrill was held for complicity. He got out on big bonds, somehow—and vanished. And here he is —R. H. Sherrill."

Roney watched Sherrod's set face. Then his tight lips moved. He shook his head.

"I don't know what you mean. Sherrill—robbery? Stolen money, and I know where it is?" He turned abruptly. "Roney, do you believe this?"

"Isn't a matter of believing. Givens is here looking the matter up. See here, Sherrod—you're in no position to deny what he says, because you can't remember. Don't you see? In God's name, man, isn't there a flicker—the slightest suggestion of your past?"

Sherrod sat back, turned his face full to the light.

"No," he said deliberately. "Nothing."

"You deny nothing, admit nothing?"

"How can I admit— Admit what?"

Givens thrust a hairy arm across the table.

"Damn it, kid, you better admit! I'll get you to the chair before I end! Listen—"

His hand clutched Sherrod's sleeve, and Sherrod was on his feet like a cat. His left arm swung and the impact of hard knuckles cracked on Givens' cheek. The Washington man slumped back.

"Keep your hands off me," growled Sherrod.

"Sherrod," whispered Roney, "you better go along with him quietly back to the States. If you love this girl, you will."

"He'll go!" Givens mopped his cheek, perspiring, breathing thickly. "I gave him two chances, and get this. Just one more thing: Sherrod, did you talk with Nick Varelos yesterday at Atengo?"

"Saw him a minute. What of it?"

"You see him often. Doesn't Nick bring something to mind?"

Sherrod put a hand to his brow puzzledly. Roney saw his eyes narrow as they had done at the Atengo club when his first outburst came. A twist of agony to his face ended in something like a sinister leer at the other men.

"No. See here, I'm fed up with this. I'm going to the house."

He was out on the moonlit path. Givens took one step and muttered:

"I gave you the chances, fella. This thing could have been fixed up quietly. I ain't told half I know. I ain't started to jog your memory yet. Now, once more, Sherrod, listen to me."

"Go to hell," said Sherrod casually, and went on into the shadow of Up Rock House.

Roney came out of the pavilion. Givens was staring up at the dark verandas. He came nearer the consul.

"Thought I heard somebody. Do you think she could have listened from up there?"

"Miss Manning? She wouldn't—certainly not."

Givens followed uneasily, and muttered again:

"Somehow, I don't like this spot. So I'll have to break Sherrod, hey? Good night."

He went to his room. Roney retired, disturbed enough.

MONDAY noon brought every one to luncheon except Sherrod, who was down at the port. The *Islander* would dock today. Warm, live little breezes strayed to the dining room. Nel Manning, to Roney's surprise, devoted herself to Givens, telling him of Obeah rites she'd seen down the wilder islands when cruising with her father. Givens was flattered, absorbed, forgetful; he was still listening to the girl when her father drove away in his car for the lowlands. Then the Washington man came out on the veranda where Roney was watching a dim smoke smudge to the south.

"The *Islander*," grunted Johnny. "She always waddles into port like a panting old woman who's just missed a train."

"Don't slander dad's shipping," said Nel. "Anyway, she's bringing our weekly picture show—unless Varelos got drunk."

Givens eyed Roney closely.

"Pictures—now they're interestin', ain't they?"

"Oh, rot! But there's nothing else to do. Newsreel are best, even if they're mostly American. And ancient ones—I imagine Mr. Givens has seen our show months ago at home."

Givens lapsed into silence. When Nel Manning insisted he must have a noonday nap, he submitted. Johnny Roney passed the guest's door later on his way to his own room. Givens sat on the bed, thinking ponderously. Then he unhitched a gun holster from under his arm, slung it under his pillow and stretched out in the shaded room.

"Well, I'm damned," muttered Roney. "What's he expecting? Utter nonsense here. I'd think he'd know better."

Johnny saw no one about the house till long after the siesta hours. Bathed and dressed he came down to the lofty sitting room to find Givens moving silently about, fingering the costly drapes, idly touching silver and rosewood, as if wondering at their worth. Then he poured himself a drink from Manning's ancient decanters.

He looked up when Roney entered.

"Say, brother, at Palm Beach this would be a knockout. Listen to the waterfalls and see the parrots working in and out like crazy traffic lights. And Sherrod thought he'd cop it all!"

Roney was too disgusted to answer. Washington sent out some queer men on undercover work undoubtedly, but Givens just didn't fit in here. The consul answered curtly:

"Givens, let's get this over. It's agonizing."

Givens' heavy professional manner returned.

"Leave it to me. I don't want to scandalize these folks. It's me that's tryin' to save 'em trouble, and it's Sherrod who's makin' it, understand?"

Roney wandered out. He was sorry for Sherrod in a way, but saving the Mannings humiliation was all that he wished. Dinner brought guests; Seeley, the coffee expert and his wife; the schoolmaster, his wife and giggling daughter; a bachelor field manager or two—outdoor, sun browned colonials, doing their best at the owner's board. Manning beamed and Nelita sparkled. There were but three who seemed subdued—the three Americans: Sherrod, Givens and Consul Roney.

So dinner went well enough. But at coffee, out on the softly lighted veranda, Johnny groaned to himself:

"And it's all going to smash. Why did that lost bird, Sherrod, ever drift this way?"

Later the house party sauntered leisurely down the road to the cinema. The operator was trying out his lights. Shadows came to the white screen. The rude benches were filled with black country folks long before Manning's guests filed to their railed enclosure. Mothers hushed their children, men murmured greetings to old Angus. The seating put Sherrod, Nel Manning, Roney and Givens in the forward row of chairs. A quietly appreciative group of white island people was behind them. Manning was being gallant to the schoolmaster's young wife, not long out from Yorkshire.

Givens had the end seat next to Roney. He twisted around to watch the operator's booth on a rude little platform back of the benches. The thin faced Varelos was ready; with a sputter of sound and light from the projecting machine, the picture came to the screen.

Not what one would call a first class presentation. The screen billowed in stray airs that rustled the date palms beyond the thatched walls. There were giggles and soft Afric whispers along with the purring of the film. "Hollywood Love" was the feature, and the

islanders drank it all in with wide eyes and parted lips. The lovers in a final clinch, the villain mugging to his evil end; here, on a Carib mountaintop, under star and palm, the West Indians forgot life in a hunger for dreams . . .

Roney saw Sherrod's face, calm with a fixed grimness, and then Nel Manning's with the trace of a disdainful smile. Then he knew that Givens was leaning forward to see past him, watching Sherrod. Roney twitched against the other man's bulk. Givens must be forcing some mental torture on Sherrod, compelling him to some tragic self-illumination. But what had this tawdry screen romance to do with it?

Then there was black laughter from the benches. Varelos had his comedy on, and even the sedate white group chuckled. Old Manning leaned forward, smiling to his daughter in the chair ahead.

And still the play went on. Some one was acting now, thought Roney, and not upon the ghostly screen. Then Givens stirred.

The newsreel had begun. Roney turned to glimpse Varelos in the booth. The light showed his dim, distorted face. Varelos was frightened. Givens was watching him and Varelos cringed.

The American consul turned to the screen again. The newsreel must be ancient stuff, blotching, flickering, crowding fast upon the cloth.

Winter sports at Montreal; a factory fire in Brooklyn; a California flower festival; a world's series—let's see, now, Johnny Roney was thinking. In what year did the Cardinals play the Yankees? . . .

Johnny turned in surprise. Then he heard a gasp at Nel Manning's shoulder. Sherrod was staring wide eyed at the screen.

The last news item: a wrecked train, a shattered mail car, débris still smoking, and dim groups of deputies and bystanders idling about under a lowering Western sky . . .

Givens was on his feet. He whirled in the dim aisle and started back. Roney saw Varelos hustling about his booth as the film faded with a final snapping of the machine.

People were rising. Little black boys scurried for the exit. Their elders stood aside as the white guests strolled out, commenting appreciatively on their host's little show. Dupree Island's fortnightly glimpse of the great world had ended.

Givens stood at the door till the last spectators were out. And these were Robert Sherrod and Manning's girl. They came slowly in a grand pride, it seemed. Robert Sherrod looked Givens full in the eyes as they passed—a blank, absent stare as if, never in any life he could recall, Givens had figured.

"Bluffing," grunted Johnny. "Acting a part now—but what was the game? No sense to it, no finish."

HE FOLLOWED up the road where Manning's guests were being driven homeward. The pleasant island voices and the host's hearty goodbys. Nel Manning was laughing at her father's side. Sherrod had gone to the big house. Roney thought he stood bowed, watching the distant sea, stricken and humbled now, unable to be with the others. Then Manning's girl ran to him on the steps.

The planter was in the hall, a bit puzzled at the absence of Givens and Roney for the nightcap drink. Then Johnny heard Nel's voice. Dad was tired, and must be in bed; she would see to the closing of the house. Roney went back to the dark theater. Givens had disappeared under the thatched marquee. His low voice snarled from the projection booth:

"Lost your nerve, damn you, Nick! Give me that film. You stopped it when the punch was comin'—the blowoff on Sherrod. All right, you rat. I'll handle it now!"

Varelos' whisper rose to a frenzy.

"You said he'd weaken before this. I live in these islands and you don't.

They can make big trouble for me, if this don't go over on Sherrod—"

"Hand over that film can. I'm still talkin' business to Sherrod. Manning next, if Sherrod don't come through. Give me that film!"

Varelos was backing to the stairs, protesting. It ended in a cry, a blow, the crash of a body on the planks, then the dirt floor. When Roney ran to the steps, the Atengo cinema man reeled up, bleeding from eye to chin, and staggered back to the empty benches. But the consul dashed up the stairs. Givens was shoving a pocket flash about the projector and the littered floor. Then he picked up a battered film can. He started slightly at Roney's entrance, then grumbled on.

"Mr. Consul, I had to give that rat a rush out of here. Looks to me like he and Sherrod got together and foxed us. I'll have to say I was usin' Varelos—he was a stool pigeon for my work back in the States, understand? I thought I could trust him here. I got some stuff in a newsreel that'll show Sherrod who he was. Now I want you to know I hated to do this—I tried to fix it up quietly, see?"

"Maybe so, but your methods are damned queer, Givens."

"I'm workin' on a queer bird, ain't I?"

"Damned queer," assented Roney. "But, Givens, you're rough and a bit ridiculous, I'd say. Now that bit of old news film—did you think it would jolt him to remembrance? If so, he covered it mighty well."

"Clever guy. If he's actin', he's grand. He even fooled the girl—never quivered when he saw a scene that he must have recognized quick as thought."

"Did he?" The consul's cool eyes studied the man from home. "Maybe not. Varelos was the one who couldn't stand the test."

Givens started—and recovered his composure.

"Oh, sure, Nick quit on me. Nick lost his nerve when it came to showin' the last take of that newsreel. And, Mr. Consul, I know why. Varelos was scared of a knife in his ribs. This Sherrod is a tougher egg than you think. Now, I'm no nut doctor, but my guess is that Sherrod's comin' back fast. He knows himself now, and he saw a trap. And he's got the mental drop on Varelos. Nick is a weak brother at best. I was afraid—"

Givens paused and came over to where Roney was examining the celluloid ribbon under the booth light.

"Be careful of that film, mister. The last hundred feet is the fatal spot for Sherrod—and he knows it now."

Givens reached for the metal container with a swift, suspicious glance at Johnny Roney.

"Old news stuff," muttered Roney. "How'd you get it?"

"From the newsreel people who took it, certainly. But I ain't tellin' all the Department's inside business. Only this much: Varelos was the cameraman for 'em who was sent out on this Marvin train robbery case. He saw Sherrod—or Sherrill, as his name is. When Varelos drifted down through these islands and got this job here, he recognized Sherrod again."

"Nick knew Sherrod's real identity all this time and never said a word? Never a sign to Sherrod himself?"

Givens hesitated.

"Nick says so. Maybe he had reasons for silence. Maybe he was scared of knowin' too much. Varelos is a weak brother—he might have been in trouble himself back home."

The consul watched Givens keenly.

"One more question: Do you think Sherrod ever recognized Varelos?"

"A guy in a jam like Sherrod was then might not notice a cameraman grindin' film on him. But the newsreel fella would. I'll admit now that the first tip came from Varelos that the missin' mail clerk was down here. The Marvin gang had been convicted by that time, but the loot was never found. So the Government was still workin' on the case, see? When I got the tip, it

was easy to trace Sherrod back to that hospital—and Sherrill had disappeared about that time. Just a simple hookup for me, mister."

"Not so simple. Why did Nick Varelos wait two years before turning Sherrod up, and then inform you, Givens—just you?"

The Federal man's hard eyes shifted; plainly he was irritated at Roney's absorbed questions. Then he grumbled:

"Never mind that end. Inside stuff, brother. Varelos wasn't in shape to do anything without me. And my business is to break down Sherrod's blank wall. Smash him with the evidence that will show him up. Mister, I didn't want to do it that way, but he's forced it. You saw how ugly he got at any questions."

"Naturally he would, having no memory of the Marvin affair. It's queer that Sherrod and Varelos met so frequently, eye to eye, and no hint of recognition came from Nick. He doesn't seem as clever as that."

Roney relapsed into silence; Givens was watching him uneasily; evidently he didn't want the consul to dwell upon any present connection of Sherrod and Varelos.

What could there be except Sherrod's secret? But it was no secret to Sherrod, because he remembered nothing beyond the moment when Manning's girl smashed him to blessed oblivion.

Givens fidgeted; he didn't like the study which Roney was bending to the case. He leaned closer with a thick whisper:

"Mr. Consul, you're standin' by me and the Department, ain't you? You see your duty, don't you?"

"Don't let that worry you. If Sherrod won't leave, you'll have to extradite him; and all that rotten publicity is what I'm trying to avoid for the Mannings' sake."

"Didn't I do my best? It ain't too late yet. Maybe this bird had a faint glimmer when he saw that wreck film, but I still got the hot white light to burn into his darkness. If he'd seen all the newsreel, he couldn't deny himself—unless he's clear crazy. Maybe he is now."

"I never saw such a level headed chap as Sherrod seems. And that proves to me that he doesn't see the trap you set."

"I want one more chance with him—just him alone, mister."

RONEY was listening to the distant singing of the waterfall in Dupree's higher rocks. The trade wind rustled the palm fronds against the thatch, but there were other sounds. Steps on the stairs to the booth; then Manning's girl rounded the turn. Sherrod was behind her, his hand gripping Varelos' collar. They stopped in the booth light, and Varelos shrank when Givens' hairy hand dropped from the film can. Roney thought he was reaching for his gun. But Givens merely grumbled patiently.

"Lady, this is private business. The consul and me—"

"I'm going to see Nick's newsreel—all of it—now!"

Roney glanced at Sherrod's grim face, and muttered:

"Nel, please go away. This is rotten—"

"Run that film, Nick," said Miss Manning evenly. "I can do it myself; but you will, or I'll have a constable take you to Atengo tomorrow. Show that picture, Varelos!"

Varelos gave Givens a frightened look. The man from Washington had backed away in a deadly silence. Then he spoke, just as Varelos turned the switch by his projector. Far in the hills, in a ferny gorge, they heard the singing waterfall which gave the light for Sherrod's undoing.

But Givens growled on:

"Miss Manning, I didn't want to do this. I gave this fella his chance. Ask the consul here if I didn't try to get him away with no trouble to you—"

"Start that picture, Nick!"

"All right," snarled Givens, "shoot the works."

"Shoot the works!" cried Manning's girl.

So, in another silence, the last of the newsreel came again. The machine was purring and the light flickered, steadied above the empty benches. A dim prairie, a wrecked car on a railroad grade, dirty snow, idlers and Western deputies . . .

Givens was sneering, but there was a desperate catch in his voice when he said:

"All right—Sherrill. Here's where you ride—and you tell the rest. You remember yourself now, don't you, Sherry?"

The whir of the machine went on in the theater, empty save for the four in the booth. The moon struck through the thatch chinks; no one moved.

The tiny frames of film clicked past the dazzle of arcs which threw them on the distant screen. Pictures, bits of life—the scroll of fate unfolding. Fatal to everything Sherrod had built for himself. The dingy steps of a Kansas courthouse. A policeman herding boys away. From the door came three men with guarding deputies on either side. Two who slouched along with indifferent contempt. A third who came with his head high but a frightened, hopeless look on his face. Clear, very clear—the clearest of all—was Robert Sherrod.

The newsreel snapped off. The white screen was empty. The reflected light showed the four people in the little booth.

Givens turned uneasily in the silence.

"Well, am I right? No hokum—am I right?"

"You're absolutely right," said Manning's girl.

Roney glanced at Sherrod's drawn, grim face. Stricken with memory or not, Sherrod was dumb. Givens shoved before him, leering.

"Maybe you wish now you'd dealt with me. Maybe, even now, it ain't too late. The girl knows, but maybe we can fix—"

Sherrod suddenly plunged before him, hand reaching for Givens' throat.

"Rat! Lying, blackmailing rat—get out of here!"

"He can't get away from Dupree, Robert," said Nel Manning.

The flimsy stairs crashed beneath Sherrod's rush as Givens backed down. The Department man was shouting:

"Got to you, hey? Woke you up, did it?"

Then he choked again. The two swung fighting against benches in the dark. Blows and curses; and Johnny Roney came down the broken steps upon them when they arose. Orange light pinged in the gloom, as Givens dragged at his gun, shooting as he tried to raise it. Then Sherrod's fist crashed on his jaw again.

Roney saw Sherrod stumbling above a fallen man. But the consul looked up to the booth. Light was growing there—a dazzling flare under wreathing fumes. Deadly stuff. Varelos leaped from the platform, clutching at his throat. Manning's girl was coughing, but she picked a deliberate way down the wrecked stairway. Roney ran to her shouting:

"Get out of there! The film's burning!"

"I know it is. Celluloid goes frightfully fast when you stop a reel with the switch on. I've lost pictures myself that way."

Johnny clutched her, dragged her to the exit.

"Nel, you switched on—you fired that film purposely!"

"I know I did. And burned up the show, theater and all. But we own it, Mr. Roney."

"Oh, Lord! I give you up. Sherrod's the man in the newsreel, and it's gone! Nel Manning, you knew Sherrod was the man!"

"I've known it four years or so. Roney, stop that fellow—Nick Varelos—don't let him get away from here!"

The frightened Atengo cinema man was rushing for the roadside bush when Johnny overtook him. It was no part

of consular duty to swing with the left and then cross a right, but Varelos was clawing at the American representative in blind panic.

Miss Manning spoke casually.

"Out—cold. And I thought you were just a tennis chap and a rotten player at that!"

SHERROD was coming back from the road. Givens had retreated that far and halted. They were both watching the flame mounting behind the thatch wall chinks. Fragments of burning film had blown along the dried palm stuff, whose light began to show the faces of the four.

"Nel Manning, you know Robert's story? How could you unless he was faking this amnesia—lost identity—all that?"

"He was. He's been a grand actor for four years."

Roney glanced at Givens. Givens' face was stupid with amazement. He opened his mouth and no words came. Manning's girl suddenly laughed.

"It's a knockout. Look at him, Robbie? His wits have gone worse than Nick's. He doesn't know what it's all about because he fooled himself every step he made."

Roney turned to Sherrod.

"You lied then, lied from the first—"

"Call it what you wish," retorted Sherrod. "Nel knew it all from the beginning. She even planned the end of it for me. But the thing is that this man Givens knows absolutely that I wasn't the guilty man in that Marvin mail robbery. He knew it was Dorman, the clerk who was killed by the dynamite accidentally when the gang blew the car door in. The Government arrested me, yes—then held me as a material witness till the Marvin gang was run down. And when the trial came I had vanished—unconscious for weeks in that hospital after Nel's car ran me down. It looked bad, didn't it?

"I didn't even know I was cleared till months later. And, Roney, even before that—when I came to in the ward—I discovered that no one knew I was Sherrill. I lay there in a blessed peace, wondering why no one knew. Couldn't understand it; and the idea came—why go back to all that wretched mess? Dorman was dead, and the bandits convicted. I hadn't a relative in the world who cared much what I did—and then Nel came and stood by my bed and smiled. Oh, Lord, I didn't want to tell her about my trouble out in Kansas, so I said my name was Sherrod—and I didn't know anything else about myself!"

"Fooled her, too," grunted the consul.

"Oh, no!" said Nel Manning. "He didn't do anything of the kind! I knew he was Roger H. Sherrill, mumbling there in the ward, doing the best he could with a cracked skull—and I knew I was responsible. I knew all about him. I saw him in a newsreel on Broadway two weeks before he came East trying to find Dorman's mother and comfort her a bit; I recognized him in the newspaper clippings and court papers and all the stuff I found in his pockets the night I ran him down on the Post Road."

"Picked his pockets!" gasped the American consul.

"Yes. I wanted to know whom I'd almost killed. Then I kept silent, for I thought at first perhaps he was guilty in that Marvin affair—and I was sorry. When he recovered a bit and said he was Sherrod, I was interested, wondering if he really knew he wasn't. But I never cared for Robert—even imagined loving him—until he was out of the hospital and confessed to me he'd been faking; only wanted to go away somewhere and never bother me again. I wouldn't let him. I sent him down here to dad as Robert Sherrod, the new man he wanted to be. Poor old dad, he wanted to make amends, but he didn't know all I knew."

"That hurts," muttered Sherrod. "I made a mistake there—"

"It was my fault," put in Nel Man-

ning, "but I didn't see why dad should be worried. He wouldn't have understood the case."

"Givens," called out Sherrod, "do you —now?"

Givens had listened like a man in a trance. He seemed unable to answer when Sherrod's challenging voice rose sharply.

"Roney, this fellow imposed on you. He's no Government agent. He used to be a plainclothesman in Kansas City till he was convicted of extortion in some bootlegging case and drew two years. That's why Nick Varelos had to wait before they could frame a blackmailing scheme on me. Nick gave Givens the tip."

It was the consul's turn to be dumb with amazement. Nick Varelos sat up in the road ditch and listened dazedly. Johnny Roney turned on Sherrod and Nel Manning with a resentment which he meant to be official.

"See here, do you mean to say you knew Givens was making a fool of me and you never told me?"

"We weren't sure when he arrived," said Nel Manning. "Not till he openly told Robert that he wanted ten thousand dollars to keep his mouth shut and let our wedding come off without a lot of unpleasant publicity, were we sure. Then I sent a radio from Atengo through the fruit company office to Washington, and the answer completely discredited Givens."

"Then why in Pete's name didn't you expose him?"

"Same reason." The girl smiled. "We didn't want that old miserable story gossiped up and down the islands. Poor dad, having to explain that I'd married a man who had another name and had been mixed in a Wild West train robbery. You know how falsehood travels and what a wretched time truth has to overtake it."

"But you let me be the goat," grumbled Roney. "Givens must have forged that letter from the Department introducing him to me. I suppose even a cheap dick could get the proper letterhead and fake a signature to it. Givens, damn you, is that so?"

Givens would not answer. They could guess that he was recovering from a mental shock of his own and wondering how a man might leave an island which was a one-man show, run by a girl from behind the scenes.

At least Varelos realized it. He came over, whining unintelligibly, to Manning's girl.

"Shut up!" she said. "You're leaving by Wednesday's steamer. You'll not open your mouth at Atengo, or ever come back."

VARELOS cringed with relief. Nel Manning ignored him and turned to Roney.

"You understand, don't you, that Nick had been hinting petty blackmail to Robert for two years past? And Robert would never admit he had any idea what was meant. And Varelos was too weak a wretch to force the issue. He waited until Givens got out of jail and then wrote him about that newsreel which could expose Robert. Givens came with it, planning that if he couldn't get money from Sherrod, then certainly my father would pay to have the story hushed up. No wonder they wanted it done privately and tried to use you, Johnny, in the game!"

Givens got his voice at last, even if it was no more than a croak. He came to Roney, mopping a swollen eye and straightening his collar.

"Listen, mister—you call yourself consul. I come to you, a 'Merican citizen in distress and you let me get framed like this—"

"Shut your rotten mouth, or I'll take a punch at you myself!"

"Aw right, brother," said Givens, and resumed his stare at the burning thatch.

When Sherrod walked near him with swinging fists, Givens backed closer to Varelos.

"The trouble with you, Givens," said Sherrod, "is that your brains never got

above your shoetops since your old days flatfooting the pavements in Kansas City. You knew I was cleared of that Marvin case, but you thought I was a real amnesia victim and so wouldn't know whether I was guilty or not. You thought I'd pay money not to find out. So did Nick Varelos."

"There's father," said Nel Manning hurriedly. "Robert, please go meet those fieldhands and stop their yelling. And of course this fire was an accident —nothing to be excited about."

Young Sherrod went alertly down the road to meet the first black men. The glare of the burning thatch played on terrace and garden, field and distant cliffs where Dupree's twin peaks rose to the Southern Cross.

Nel Manning was going to old Angus, who was hurrying from Up Rock House, tugging at his pajama strings. But Roney detained her a moment. Then she went on. The consul turned to Givens.

"You're sailing Wednesday. With Varelos. And until the tradeboat leaves tomorrow for Atengo, you and Nick will spend the time down at Manning's wharf. There's the road and it's only nine miles. Beat it!"

Givens made one throaty bluster.

"Call yourself consul—"

Roney walked closer.

"Open your mouth again and you'll do five years in a colony jail here for blackmail. With the natives it's not so nice for a white man. Or I'll see that you're met in New York by Government men for forging those papers on me. I'm just letting you go on Manning's account. The rest of us don't give a damn. We'd rather send you to High Court and British justice, and tell the whole story."

"Where's my hat?" said Givens, and went fumbling in the grass. Varelos had vanished with him down the road when Angus Manning turned from the house drive. His daughter was laughing.

"Jolly old blaze, dad! We were fooling with the film in the projector when it jammed and caught fire. Mr. Roney did it—you know how he always tangles things up."

"Bless me!" panted Manning, his hand to his heart. "Nothing but a shack, Roney. Perfectly all right—we'll build a better one in a week. I hope no one was hurt?"

"We all feel better," said Nel. "And do you know, Mr. Givens has gone down to the waterside? Frightful hurry. He remembered a wireless he should have sent from Atengo. So Robert'll arrange for the launch early. Nick Varelos is getting away also."

"Bless me!" repeated the planter. "Queer sort—Mr. Givens—he never seemed easy a minute since he came here. And he imagined that once he'd seen Robbie in the States—"

"Oh, likely enough," retorted Nel. "What of it? Here's Robert now. And, dad, you must go back to bed—"

Johnny Roney heard their voices in the shadow of the veranda; Nel urging that a toddy would be the thing, and then she'd fetch the whisky out to the other men while they waited for the thatch to burn down. So Johnny was alone when Sherrod came back.

"You damn fool," said the consul, "why didn't you come to me with your story long ago?"

"Yes?" Sherrod grinned. "But you were the only person I was really afraid of. I was upstage with you because, as a friend, you'd be too damned clever. I liked you at a distance. Once started, I had to act this business out."

"Superb acting. When you wailed at the club about your lost self, I thought you were a real nut. But, Sherrod, I'll have to verify your story officially—but privately. Departmental files cover a lot of worse affairs by Yanks on the loose."

"Certainly—go to the bottom of it. Then we'll report to Manning." Sherrod put out his hand with a grave smile. "I won't marry Nel till the record's straight."

FLENCHER'S ISLAND

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

Concluding a Novel of the South Seas

PETER ROWLES, a young American botanist in the Fiji Islands, and Gytha Crosbie, were tricked into taking a passage from Suva in Flencher Peruvio's brigantine *Scorpion,* and shanghaied to a mysterious island upon which Peruvio planned to set up a modern Eden. He wanted Peter to direct the work on his plantations; while Gytha was to act as companion to his mother, a mad woman. His last light-of-love, Flamette, Peruvio left behind, and she immediately joined forces with his arch enemy, Yule.

Peter and Peruvio fought when the American demanded that Gytha and himself be set ashore at the nearest port, and he was beaten into unconsciousness. When he recovered his senses he found himself a prisoner in the forecastle. He then learned from the steward, Jovial Jinks, that the crew planned to kill Peruvio as soon as they learned the hiding place of a rich treasure he was believed to have buried. Jinks told Peter that he had stolen parts of the jigsaw puzzle which occupied much of Peruvio's time, believing it to be a map to the

treasure trove.

Upon sighting his island, Peruvio deliberately ran the *Scorpion* on to a reef, thus destroying their only means of escape back to civilization.

One morning the body of the cook, Naka, was found at the foot of a cliff near the house. Jinks investigated the spot, and discovered a chest he took to be Peruvio's treasure. He then tried to kill Peruvio, but lost his own life in the attempt. Maxon, the mate, secretly carried on the search for the treasure.

Gytha began to lose heart as time wore on, but one day, just as it began to look as if Peruvio had made good his boast that none should ever leave the island, an airplane appeared out of nowhere and circled the house. One of the sailors began to semaphore to the pilot with his arms.

"He's signaling!" cried Gytha.

Peruvio rushed into the house and secured a rifle. He knelt, sighted and fired—but not at the plane.

THE one eyed man stopped signaling. He spun around, crumpled and uttered one yell. The smile returned to Flencher's face.

"That's a message he never got delivered!" he remarked.

The plane straightened out and sped away, and Peter stood thoughtfully watching it go.

"It'll teach them," Flencher added as he left them. "Let it teach you, too."

Flencher entered the house and filled the place with his cursing. Gytha had got her charge to sleep again, and sat reading. She looked up and whispered to him to hush, and he blazed at her. She shook her head, nodding toward the old woman's room, and he was at once silent and shamefaced. He looked into the room, shook his head self-reproachfully and then turned to Gytha.

"Come outside and talk to me," he said hoarsely. He took her arm, drawing her after him to the garden.

"That damned flying machine got me going," he muttered. "That's twice one o' those bloody kites has hove in sight o' me lately. When I first came to the islands a steamer was a novelty; now they drop out o' the skies on a man, if he wrecks himself on a desert island."

"You remember I warned you that it wasn't possible nowadays to steal people, don't you?" she whispered back with a smile, feeling safe in his regard for the old lady's rest.

He looked grim, but presently chuckled and pinched her arm.

"Maybe you're right, Gytha. Stealing 's risky these days. But I couldn't have got you here any other way, could I? Now I've got you here and you can't leave."

"Don't be so sure about that," she returned sharply. "That plane will land in Suva, and do you think they won't report something queer on an island in—"

"Rats! I got that swine before he could tell 'em much. And nobody knows where this island is. Jinks was a smart little rat, but even he didn't know any better than to fiddle with a puzzle to find—"

"You're only fooling yourself, Captain. If the position isn't known, those men in the plane will know how long it took to reach Suva after sighting this island, and the direction they flew. I'm satisfied I shall get home very soon now."

Flencher bent his heavy brows in puzzled thought. His powerful hands gripped his knees, and the breath hissed through his nostrils. Presently he gripped her shoulder.

"Gytha," he uttered, "I carried you off for the same reason that I have carried off many women. Flamette was good enough until I saw you. Flamette was willing to come here and live with me, and she promised to care for mother. But Flamette is just an island cat, and I expected to have to whip her into shape. She was the sort I was used to, and beating that sort does 'em good. I never felt like beating you, Gytha. The minute you stepped into the house, I

knew I'd have killed that other woman in a week. Haven't I chucked out her stinking fripperies to make your room sweeter? Have I ever bothered you with lovemaking? I could, and you know it, for you've got no escape. I don't want it—until you say so. But I won't hear you talk of leaving—even if that was possible.

"Can't you see what I'm doing here? Have you seen one piece of work that isn't for the making of a garden out of a desert? You've seen my people—they are happy. I stole 'em as I stole you, but have you seen any of 'em crying? I told you I meant to make Flencher's Island a new Eden. That was my little joke—the name was—but isn't it true? All my life I've battled the world—and the world shut my mother in a lunatic place. If I went to Sydney now, they'd hang me—and everywhere I go men grin behind my back and call me a butcher.

"You don't want to go back to a world like that, Gytha. What is there in it for you? You've been happy here. I can see that. The place fits you. Go back to the places they call towns, and what is there? Here you can be a queen, and it's up to you to govern as you want. There you're one of a mob—a flock of silly sheep: you have to change clothes to go to other people's houses just so they can see you've got 'em. If you step aside to pick a banana, they'll clap you in jail. Here, if a man or woman looks sideways at you, I'll kick 'em over the cliff!"

"I'm afraid you might do that to me, if you felt like it," Gytha said whimsically.

He seized her in his arms, but did not kiss her. There was real pain in his eyes.

"If I ever did that in a rage, I'd land beside you," he said passionately. "Gytha, you can't quit me! Can't you see?"

"I have friends, and they must believe me dead," she said patiently. "I warned you I should never cease seeking a chance to get home. But I do appreciate your recent treatment of me and I do my best to show it."

"Don't strain my patience then!" he snapped with abrupt change of tone. He stalked toward the house. "You can do anything with me, girl, but don't ever think of leaving me. That's one thing you'll never do while I'm living!"

Maxon climbed over the cliff path and approached Peruvio in evident uncertainty. The skipper stood glaring at him.

"Sorry to butt in, Cap'n, but you've scared the lads so they won't chance it," said Maxon, attempting a grin for Gytha's sake. "Jinks hasn't turned up with stores today, and the lads want their supper."

"Jinks is on a job for me," retorted Peruvio coolly. "Better put another man in his place. He won't be doing any more cooking for you. Come and get your stores." He led the way to the store hut, Maxon following with a puzzled expression, not unmixed with fear. Flencher remarked over his shoulder, "Neither will that dog who tried to signal that plane do any more cooking—except in hell!"

"Signaling, Cap'n?" Maxon's voice was artlessly innocent. "He wasn't signaling. He couldn't. He was just feeling good with rum."

"Then tell 'em not to feel so damned good in the future!"

CHAPTER XVIII

MAXON

ELI MAXON had a fine notion. If he took on Jinks' job himself, he would have an excuse for passing back and forth which he lacked while simply overseer of the men. Part of the track from islet to house lay up that cliff path where Naka had died. Near that path lay a spot which Maxon ached to examine; for he had seen, from concealment, two blacks and Peruvio lowering something over the cliff which, to his discerning eye, was like a chest.

He had not seen the exact spot it was landed in; nor could he see, from any part of the path, any trace of a hiding place. But every time he traversed that path he became a more familiar figure to any of those inconvenient blacks who might be around; now and then he dared to sidle along the cliff face before taking the upper track to the plateau.

The men saw nothing queer in the man who was recently mate of the *Scorpion* brigantine taking over the job of camp cook in addition to his ordinary job of directing their work. One and all they were quite fed up with Flencher Peruvio's little pleasantries and had no yearning for closer communion with him. Maxon worked double watches, but he was satisfied—he had his own little game to play. He held a small opinion of the men's shrewdness. Tug Lammas and Bill Blades at least might have been expected to show more courage. They seemed to be as cowed as the rest. And that was well.

Life in the house had settled down to a quiet domesticity which amused Peter. He had forgotten all about a treasure. What he had decided to do was to carry on, avoiding unpleasantness as much as possible, never ceasing to hunt for that boat he believed must exist, hoping, and feeling surer daily, that some vessel would sight the island regardless of Flencher's vehement assurance of the impossibility of such a thing.

Gytha noticed the tranquil current of daily life too; but it frightened her, without in the least amusing her. The old lady had taken a tremendous fancy to her. Flencher's eyes rested upon her with deep affection whenever she and her charge were together.

Every little suggestion she made for changes in the house was carried out at once; if it were something beyond the power or skill of the men available, those men were driven to perform the impossible by Flencher's grim force, and they did it. Even the distant waterfall was harnessed, because she once said that a bathroom in the house would be a pleasure. Men slaved from dawn to dark and made a trough of bamboos from the waterfall to the bathroom; and Gytha was afraid to make any more suggestions.

She feared every single development, for every addition to the comfort of the place seemed to be as another nail in the coffin of hope. She even felt a sense of permanency herself, until she angrily shook it off. Maxon offered many suggestions to her while he directed the final connection of the water supply. That had given him chances for hanging about the house. He had found an opportunity to whisper to her that he was on the edge of a discovery which might mean their release; and in using the plural he had given her a leer of meaning. She would welcome release, in anybody's company; but that leer of Eli Maxon's troubled her as no look of Peruvio's had ever done. She declined all his suggestions, pleasantly but firmly.

In the evenings, when Mrs. Peruvio was tucked inside her mosquito bar, sleeping like a happy babe with her bedizened doll hugged against her breast, Peruvio sometimes read, sometimes sat for hours without moving, gazing at Gytha or his mother. Peter had a little room off the veranda, and, when he could do so without attracting attention, he amused himself with paper and pencil, trying in his amateurish way to trace the course taken by the brigantine.

He read up on tropical plants, for he was intensely interested in his work. Already he had found specimens on Flencher's Island which were new. Probably even on Penrhyn he could not have done better. But on Penrhyn he could have taken his specimens away whenever he liked, and here— Well, it was no reason why he should neglect his chances. He knew he would get away some day, and meanwhile his collection grew, and in his daily work he was able to experiment in a way that would not have been so simple elsewhere.

Sometimes Peruvio made his unwilling guests join him at one of his endless jigsaw puzzles. The man seemed to have an unlimited number of them. He was always producing a new one. When they were seated around the table, and the fascination of the game gripped them, as it usually did, Flencher would sit back and smile at their earnestness.

"One o' these days you'll find the one that's got the treasure chart on it," he chuckled softly. "If you find it, I'll let you have it."

"No thanks!" Peter grinned, picking a lizard out of the heap of pieces and gently setting it on the matting. "I don't want to take a flyer off the cliff."

"Ah, but those who took that flyer, Peter, never had my permission to play puzzles," Flencher said gently.

He left them to the puzzle and sat in the shadow. The old pain had been troubling him lately, yet he was not taking rum for it. He told Gytha, when she remarked upon it, that it was one of his whims to beat that pain without drowning it now that he was at home, where liquor could not be replaced. The thought made her shiver, because it emphasized the assurance that this was to be a permanent home.

She felt that the grim, haggard man in the deck chair, watching her and Peter from the shadow, was kind when they were submissive, smiling the brighter when he felt his grip upon them the tighter, and was wholly capable of crushing them in his own terrible hands, hurling them over the cliff, or playing any other whimsy his tortured brain suggested. And yet, when he stepped noiselessly over to look at the old lady before going to bed, there was a poignant humanity in his face which set the girl's heart aching. It was hard to hate him, then.

PETER came seeking her a few days later. He was excited. Flencher was down on the shore. There was a film over the sun, and the reef had been roaring for two days past. Along the beach, balls of white spume bobbed like lumps of meringue. Peter was windburned and his clothes had been drenched and dried upon him. His grin was the grin of a conquerer.

"We're saved, Gytha!" he told her excitedly.

His body quivered with eagerness to impart his news. But he was cautious. He glimpsed the old lady pottering about among her flowers, and she chilled him. Peter could never understand how Gytha could go on living with such a cold blooded old lunatic.

"Walk down to the pigsties and let me tell you," he whispered. She followed him and, out of sight of the garden, he said, "There *is* a boat! I've seen it!"

"Coming here?" she cried eagerly.

"It *is* here. It's under a cunning shed all overgrown with sea grapes. I don't see yet how I'm to get it in the water, and I have to go carefully about it, but—"

"Get Mr. Maxon to help you," she said quickly. "He's looking for it, too. Before he was sent over to the islet he told me he knew there must be one, and when he found it he'd take me away."

"Oh, did he?" snapped Peter. "Well, he won't take you without me—even if he found the boat first, which he hasn't!"

"Don't be afraid," she mocked him. "We won't leave you behind, Peter."

"I'm not thinking of myself, Gytha. Anyhow, you forget it's not he who has found the boat, but me. If we leave here, we leave together. He can come, if he cares to help. I thought you'd be so happy to know I was seeking a way out for us."

"Of course I am. For goodness' sake, don't let's wrangle about something that may never happen. Forgive me, Peter. We must keep it very quiet, and both of us must begin to hide a stock of food. You won't be able to do much for a day or two. Peruvio says we're going to have bad weather."

"I've pinched a big tin of pilot bread—"

Flencher came in sight, and Peter moved away. Something interested Flencher in the gully below. He stopped to loosen a big rock, and rolled it to the brink. Then he shoved it over, and the crash of it on the rocks beneath sent echoes all along the cliff face. He looked, dusted his hands and came toward the house, chuckling. Gytha shivered. She never saw him in that particular stage of happiness, without feeling convinced that some poor devil had come to grief.

"Some men never learn," he remarked as he neared the house.

"Have you killed somebody?" she demanded angrily.

He prodded a forefinger into her side so that she winced with pain.

"You have a bad opinion of me still, Gytha. I only gave Maxon a wetting. I don't allow rats to prowl about down there."

Gytha was skeptical.

"You only wet him? I don't believe you!"

He took her arm and led her to the cliff edge. She saw Maxon scuttling over the rocky shore of the islet as if a devil chased him. He was certainly very wet. He paused only when safe behind a rocky rampart; then he looked back, saw them watching him and shook his fist at Flencher, who turned away and laughed.

"That's one bad man, my dear," he told Gytha. "A man with no respect for women. I chased him out of here to save his life. A meddler with native women, Maxon is. Don't ever give him his way, or you'll find yourself on a lee shore."

Gytha kept silent. She wanted to retort, but the argument was against her. Together they entered the house and Flencher warned her to get a store of fresh water inside before night.

"It's going to blow hard. Perhaps you won't get outside the house for a couple of days. I'll send up stores and lamp oil and have these screens rolled up."

ON THE islet Maxon and the men sat around and smoked. Jovial Jinks had departed, and they had their suspicions about his fate.

"He must have come nigh findin' something, Eli," remarked Lammas. "He always said he'd slit Flencher's neck, if he ever found his loot."

"And he was out to get Flencher when Flencher got him—got him like he has got every man who crosses him, damn him!" growled Maxon.

"That looks as if he stumbled on the stuff, eh?" put in Blades.

"It's good enough for us to take the hint," said Maxon. "Get the picks and a couple o' drills. We'll take a look. It's going to blow, and there's rain squalls all about. Soon as the rain starts, everybody'll be under cover up there. Then we'll start."

"Suppose that plane'll bring anybody here?" Tug Lammas was gazing thoughtfully out to sea. "We don't want nobody nosin' in, if we find that stuff."

"Find it first, my son, then we'll know there must be a craft of some sort here. Flencher ain't the man to bury loot and burn his vessel and leave himself stuck for a boat. Find the stuff, then I'll bet my share of it there's a boat hidden away. We'll find that easy enough. Boats can't be stowed far from water. Take a stroll up the path, Bill. If you don't get shot at, we'll chance it." Maxon chuckled.

The wind was gusty, and the squalls came in quick succession when the day faded. Four men were left, besides Maxon, of the *Scorpion's* crew, and every one of them, Maxon included, meant to cheat the others in the end. When the word treasure prints itself on the brains of men, it usually stamps out the words loyalty and sportsmanship. Every man of the five had done a bit of secret prospecting; each now realized the wisdom of joining forces in order to spread and quicken the search. One by one they crossed the ridge, each a space behind

the one ahead, and no shot, no hurled rock assailed them.

They had the same idea that had lured Jovial Jinks to death. Where Naka had been seen was where they must look; but Maxon had watched Flencher and his blacks take up that chest. Seen it with his own eyes, and he had seen them replace it, or, if not actually that, he had seen them come down as far as the ledge. He led the men there at once. And luck was with them.

It was no dramatic, breathtaking search, with marks and measurments; no huddle over a scrap of sea stained parchment; nothing like the treasure hunting of fiction. None of the five men believed Flencher had any ancient hoard of looted church treasures buried there; all nursed the idea that it was something much more negotiable—money, pearls—ready money stuff anyhow.

They came to the place from which the chest had been removed. It remained an open hole. From it they moved along the face of the cliff, seeking signs of recent burial. Maxon, gripping a bush in passing around an outcrop, almost fell when the bush came away in his hand; and Tug Lammas, catching his arm, was struck on the head by a rolling piece of soft limestone and looked up with a curse. Blades looked up to dodge other débris, and the little gang stood gaping, speechless, wide eyed, staring at the square edge of the chest itself. Bill Blades found voice first.

"And we been callin' him clever! 'Strewth!"

"Don't stand yawping!" snapped Maxon, quickly recovering his wits. "Break it out!"

The chest came away easily. It was all so simple that Eli Maxon suspected some trick behind it. But the touch of the steel and the hope of what lay within routed suspicion. Tug Lammas tried to force his pick point into the lid. That chest was made by an artisan, and no pick could pry it open. Maxon tried his knife. The blade was too thick. The men knelt around the chest, beating upon the lid until the metal rang.

"Stow that!" said Maxon sharply. "That devil's got keen lugs. Take it over to our camp, laddies, and first thing you do make a hiding place ready to pop it into, in case Flencher comes down on us. Go on. Find a place near the water. I'm going to look for that boat before it's dark."

"To hell with hidin' it again! I'm goin' to bust it!" grumbled Bill Blades.

"Go ahead. You won't do it with the tools you've got," said Maxon. "But have your hiding place ready, that's all I say. See that rock there?" He pointed to a smooth boulder in a lee spot where it would be simple to run a boat alongside. "See if it'll lay there out o' sight. Then when you know you can pop it in a hole, try your luck at opening it."

"Eli's right," agreed Tug Lammas, and swung the chest on to his shoulder and started off.

The rest crowded at his heels, and Eli Maxon watched them with a curious smile. He had little fear that they would succeed in opening that chest. In the brief examination he had been able to give it, he had noted and appreciated the strength of its workmanship. The thing that puzzled him was the ease of finding it. But for one thing he would have decided that it was just another of Flencher's pleasantries. But he had, not long ago, been having a look for the boat they all believed was not far off; and Flencher had rolled a boulder down at him. It had missed him, given him no more than a drenching, but from it he had strengthened his belief in the boat, and surmised that he had not been very far from it.

The more he thought about it, the more he was convinced that he had been right all along and that Flencher was less of a wizard than others thought him. Many times he had believed him mad—dangerously mad—but once or twice there had been evidence that be-

sides madness there was imbecility.

The belief did not lessen the pain or indignity of that terrific brass-knuckled blow that had stretched him on the deck of the brigantine for letting his tongue wag to Peter. A madman could do that. It was yet to be paid for. A madman was not bullet proof; nor was he proof against having his loot and his woman stolen. That was the thought which made Maxon grin as he rounded the shore and crouched once more in the spot where Flencher had seen him and saluted him with a rock. Gytha was ready to step into any boat that offered the chance to get away. That weed doctor, Peter, was ready too. He could use Peter to help get the boat away, and Peter was the sort to be easily heaved to the fish when he had served his turn.

THE sea was rising. Maxon scrambled higher. When he came upon the entrance to the gully, the sprays were flying. He halted then, glancing backward anxiously. Soon the way back to the ridge, and the ridge itself, would be impassable until the tide went back. Darkness was upon him, too. The clouds were lowering and black, and there was a sullen oppression in the air. But something urged him to cross that gully. He had not reached that far before; and, of all places around the shore that he had seen, this was the most likely place to conceal a seaworthy boat with a chance of launching it.

He stepped back to the slippery weed, and to shingle, to rock again, and then plunged waist-deep into a pool. When he floundered out, he grasped the thick stems of a sea grape for support. Through the vine he crashed, and his outflung hands encountered wood. Feverishly he groped. And now exultation drove from his mind every suspicion of trickery. Here was the boat! A solid, seaworthy ship's longboat; and his seaman's touch assured him that within it lay oars, mast, sail and water kegs. Feeling beneath it, he discovered rollers, each chocked against moving until launching was desired. It was Lady Luck smiling at last on the right and proper man!

Now a tearing squall screeched along the gully and snatched him back to his position. No use fooling with the boat now. But he knew where it was, and, if he could once get that chest away from the others and stow it in the boat, it was simply a case of watching for the weather to break. He'd go back, say nothing about the boat and make a show of trying to open the chest. He covered up the boat and started back.

In half a dozen yards he was cornered. The wind outside the shelter of the gully was strong enough to flatten him against the rocks; the sea leaped around his legs. The spray and rock débris drove into his eyes, and the rock seemed to shake to the thunder of the rising gale. Sudden panic gripped him. He tried to go on, and was beaten back. The sea was well over any foothold. He clawed for safety and moved back to the boat; now the rollers filled the gully so that the pool he had fallen into was a churning caldron which he could not dare.

Above him rose the cleft of which the gully was the outlet; at the top of that lay the settlement and the house. That was not his idea of a refuge; but the sea and the wind and the creepy sensation that the rock was shaking beat all his sailor sense and drove him to climb. A cloudburst almost washed him from his precarious hold, and when it passed fear drove him on.

He reached the top and, with his head kept low, he peered across the level land. It was like a dead city. The rain fell like steel rods, and the vegetation was flat to the earth; the native huts were silent and dark. No life appeared about the big house; its windows and doors were fastened. The iron roof hummed to the rain, and a steam arose from the drenched garden.

He could not remain where he was; the water poured down past him in a

torrent that threatened to carry him with it. There was but one place for a man to hide, since the day that Flencher had ordered the natives to keep him out of their settlement; and that was the one place Flencher would never think to look. It took a man of daring to chance it, but Maxon was a man of daring.

Doubled up, almost on all fours, he ran toward the house and crawled under the floor itself beside the rain barrel, flinging himself down, panting, on the dry earth, safe as a badger in his hole.

FOR hours Maxon lay snug, the teeming rain forming a curtain all around him between floor and earth. He got thirsty, caught rain in his cupped hands and was filled. He began to feel cramped. That was not so easy to remedy, for nowhere could he rise above kneeling, and there was never a moment, or many moments, when somebody or other wasn't walking about over his head. It was very daring of him to smoke; but he took the chance and gambled on the eddies of air to carry the smoke clear.

He was hungry. Searching around him, he found two coconuts, and for the first time in his life appreciated the dexterity of men who opened the tough green nuts so simply. These were ripe nuts, and brown; not quite as tough as green ones, but presenting a terrific problem to him with only a pocket knife. His fingers were skinned and one blade of his knife broken when he at last ripped off the husk. Then he must find something on which to smash the shell.

That was a puzzle. He tried bashing it against one of the pinnings of the house, and the noise it made caused him to back into the middle of the space and crouch, shivering in terror lest it had been noticed above. He lay still for an hour after that. There was a metal rim to the top of the water barrel. If he could only sneak outside for a minute, he'd break that nut easily enough. But the rain barrel stood between Flencher's room and his mother's. True, the windows must be shut, but Flencher had sharp ears, and a magical instinct for scenting other men's activities. Maxon lighted his pipe again.

Hunger began to gnaw at his belly. He consoled himself by reckoning the hours since he had crossed the ridge. The tide must have been running back some time. Soon it would be safe for him to venture out. He scooped his sand hollow deeper and waited.

Because he had food in his hand which he could not get at, he was hungrier than he had ever been. The tobacco made it worse, instead of easing it. There came a lull in the gale. He crawled to the opening and tried to find signs of clearing. The skies were blacker than ever; and to hammer the fact home, the wind came again with force terrifically increased. And, as he started to crawl back to his hole, the earth shook and the house above him trembled.

He heard voices. Then Flencher's legs appeared, and Peter's, leaving the house. That shock had startled them, too. The legs walked away toward the cliff, and Maxon soon saw the two figures leaning against the gale. It was his chance. He crept over to the side nearest the barrel, which was out of sight from the cliff; and, with his coconut, cautiously rose to his feet, peering to both sides.

Flencher's window was shut. He was not afraid of Gytha's seeing him. In fact he wanted to see her, though he had not meant to make this the occasion. As for the old woman, she was a nut. Nobody would take notice of her, if she said she had seen him. He raised his coconut to smash it on the iron rim of the barrel; and the old lady's window shutter, right at his shoulder, was pushed open. He caught a glimpse of the silvery hair and the little, innocent face with big, guileless eyes. Then the coconut dropped from his hands, the

shutters flew against the house with a clatter, and a scream pealed out that overmatched the storm.

Other shrieks followed. The air was full of shrieks. Maxon fell to his knees in terror; and his eyes never left those two figures that turned at the cliff brink as those screams burst forth. His gaze fastened upon Flencher, hurrying to the house. Peter had to run to keep up. The gale blew them sidewise, the air was full of flying débris that stung them. They clattered on to the veranda; and Eli Maxon scrambled out from beneath the house and, with his head down, made one rush to the cliff path and over it. Tons of the cliff had fallen. The ledge slipped bodily into the sea by the ridge. He slithered down, reckless of limb—anything to get away from the Flencher's vicinity. He went across the ridge dryshod on the cliff slide; never rested until he was safe inside his hut. He wasn't hungry now.

GYTHA met Flencher at the door. She was white and shaky, her hands and arms covered with flour. Flencher glared at her.

"Who's yelling?" he demanded. Her face was white as her arms.

"Your mother upset her lamp," she told him, then was hurled aside in his frenzied rush to the room.

"I was too late, Peter," she said, shaking her head. "She's horribly burned. Oh, it was nasty!"

"What happened?" Peter queried.

He wanted to say anything to stay her shivering. She bit her lips.

"It's dark with the shutters closed," she said. "I lighted her lamp so that she could play with her beads. I only left her a few minutes, and when I came back she had caught a young rat and was going to hold it over the lamp flame. She fought me when I took it from her—her eyes simply blazed, Peter. I promised to get her something new—something she had always wanted—from my room, and she let me take the rat. I went to my room, trying to think of something to give her. She opened the shutter—she had threatened to tell Peruvio I took away the rat—and then I heard her scream. I ran in and found the window open, the rain pouring in, and she was on fire—"

Flencher came out, his face terrible.

"Get back in there!" he ordered Gytha. "You help, if you're any damned use at all," he told Peter. "If she dies—"

His fierce red gaze said all that words could not say.

CHAPTER XIX

GYTHA'S ORDEAL

STORM wrack flew overhead. The house shook to the wind's buffeting; the island reverberated to the crash of seas along the windward coast. In the old lady's room, a grim silence. Flencher paced the floor in bare feet, his lips moving soundlessly. He ignored Peter, except to drive him forth at frequent intervals to look to the fastenings. Gytha, bending over the terribly burned woman, doing her poor best to hold back a slipping soul, was the point on which Flencher's smoldering eyes were focused.

A piece of the roof lifted. Water poured in. Then the Flencher, with a blanket, knelt on the floor and swabbed up the water so that it might not inconvenience Gytha. When she sent him out to find more oil for dressings, he obeyed like a child. A violent tremor shook the place, and he went out to curse Peter. He returned to say, simply, that a few more tons of the cliff had fallen.

After many hours the old lady opened her eyes and spoke to him, and he fell on his knees, babbling incoherently. He seized Gytha's hands, when she gently prevented his hugging the patient, and kissed them fiercely. Gytha's eyes were wet. She had little hope. The woman spoke, not dully, but rather

dazedly—and it was as if another woman were speaking.

"Where am I, Luis? It's so dark. Whose hand is this on my face?"

"Don't talk, my dear," Gytha whispered. "It's all right. Nothing's the matter now. You've been ill, that's all."

"Gytha! You're a saint!" Flencher muttered in the girl's ear, and lurched out to the screaming veranda to curse. It seemed to be his only relief.

PETER was fascinated by the majesty of the storm. When previously he watched such a gale on land, it had been from a point of safety barely above the possible reach of the raging seas. Now he stood on an eyrie, looking down upon a spectacle of supreme grandeur. He had dodged flying coconuts, had learned to avoid the javelin flight of lanceolate leaves, and, after being blown from his feet twice, was content to crawl. He ventured to the cliff edge, to draw back in fright when the second landslide occurred. Flencher saw him there, and battled toward him, scorning to crawl, holding to his feet with his body thrust against the wind.

"Come in out of that, fool!" he bellowed. Peter pointed across at the islet.

"I saw a sea go right over it!" he screamed. "Those men will be swept away."

"Not they!" Flencher roared contemptuously. "They'll hang on like the rats they are."

He dragged Peter back to the house. In the lee of the building he flattened him against the wall.

"Don't you worry about the others, laddie. Nothing goes on that I don't hear about. I know all about Maxon, and the boat, and—"

"You — know?" stammered Peter. Flencher grinned.

"Didn't I tell you nobody's ever going to leave this island? What sort of a fool did you think I was? You've seen the woman Maxon was tampering with. You saw Maxon give her water he'd stolen from Gytha— Ah! That startles you! Thought I hadn't seen anything, eh? I sent Maxon away to save him from her man's knife. And her man keeps watch on everybody for me. He knows all about you, Peter, and your explorations. He knows you have found my boat. And that Maxon grabbed Gytha and kissed her and promised to take her away with him. Oh, yes indeed!"

"If you know all that, why didn't you kill Maxon as you've killed others?" yelled Peter.

The wind thundered all about them; but against the lee wall of the house was an eddy of semi-silence. His voice sounded in his own ears as if it ought to deafen anybody; but he had a queer sensation that it struck the wind like something solid and was muted by it.

"When you see what I've got cooked up for Maxon, Peter, you won't wonder why I let him off such an easy penance as mere death," Flencher told him, and lurched off around the angle to the veranda again.

Peter shivered at the cold malignity of the man, who, appearing tremendously relieved, still harbored his dark and terrible plans. But chiefly Peter shivered to think that his own plans were known. What was being cooked up for him?

And Maxon had been kissing Gytha! Peter was hot at that thought. He had not been very ardent himself, and he might have stoutly denied that he had any warm feelings toward the girl; but for another man to start hugging her, and a man like Eli Maxon—Peter suddenly awoke to a new and thrilling realization. When this gale was over, he must have a chat with Gytha. Flencher was cocksure that nobody could quit the island. Even when his concealed boat was discovered, he still scorned the notion.

Well, let him think so. Peter was not afraid of him. And Peter's brain

was as keen as Flencher's was cunning. He had a new incentive, now.

Hours later Peter peeped inside the sick room and saw Flencher sitting motionless beside the bed. The old woman's bandaged hand lay on his; against her breast sprawled Gytha's old rag doll. Flencher looked as if he had kept that position for hours; his features were drawn. Gytha slept in a deck chair, and the only movement in any part of Flencher's great body was when his brooding eyes switched from his mother's bandaged face to rest for an instant on Gytha. Peter intercepted one such glance, and he drew his breath sharply and stole away.

There sat a man of savage moods, of passions which he never checked in the slightest; and in that hour all those tempestuous passions were epitomized in a dual, tremendous love, poured impartially upon two women so utterly different that there were no worlds so far apart.

That night, when Peter was asleep, Flencher quietly locked him inside his room. Gytha had ministered to her patient, and peace seemed to have come to replace the tortures of burned flesh. Flencher watched every movement. When Gytha took pulse and temperature, and looked up to find him gazing down at her in gloomy question, she gave him a pallid smile which was poor enough assurance; but such was the intensity of his hope that it was like a cool drink to his thirsty soul.

"She'll come through?" he queried in a whisper.

"She has a chance," she answered.

He silently took her hand and drew her out of the room and into his own. She felt nervous. His gaze had been so intense. She had almost cast off her first uneasiness when she found his room and hers adjoined. He had left the key on her side. Perhaps her nerves were on edge now. The wind beneath the veranda floor was terrific. The boards quivered, and sand blew between the cracks like water. An all embracing roar had the house in a grip. He noticed her hesitation.

"Gytha, my girl, no need to be afraid of me, after this day. You've beaten me. Nobody else ever has, or could. Come inside."

He pulled her within his room and closed the door. She stood there while he lifted a heavy sea chest away from a corner and knelt on the space it had occupied. He did not try to prevent her seeing. She saw him lift a board in the floor, and noticed that no gust of wind came through. He thrust in his arms, and lifted some weighty burden which he dropped on the floor with a thud. Presently he straightened up and faced her with an impish smile, almost apologetic. At his knees were two canvas bags and a little silver box.

"Gytha, all yours," he said simply.

The bags jingled, full of coin. The little box's lifted lid revealed a dozen softly gleaming pearls of breathtaking size and form. She could not help showing interest, no woman could; but neither could she help her bewilderment. She made no movement toward the hoard. He saw her face and read her thoughts.

"All the voyage you heard yarns about treasure," he said. "There is no treasure. Here's my savings. It's yours. I told you to ask for anything I have, because you've been wonderful to her—" he jerked his head toward the partition. "You wouldn't ask for anything I could give you, so now I give it to you, without conditions. You've saved her life."

"But I don't know that I have, yet," she protested. She was doubly uneasy now, for she believed she knew him well enough to be sure that he would never do this really unconditionally. "I couldn't take that anyhow. If I succeeded in leaving this place, I'd be cheating, and if I have to say— Oh, what's the good of it?"

His gaze didn't harden. He looked up at her, kneeling on the floor, and said very gently:

"Whether you've saved her life or not, you've done more than any other man or woman on earth ever did for her, or for me. I shan't argue again about your quitting me. That can't be. But this is yours, and that I won't argue about either. Here it lies, and here you can find it. Since I can't persuade you to like me any better, I must pay you for your services. And if that's something I shouldn't say, just take it as one more bit of Flencher Peruvio's rough manners."

He laughed, replaced the hoard and the chest and opened the door for her.

THE gale moderated toward morning, and the people crept from their refuges to make good the damage. Food was cooked and light hearted voices rang again. A strong breeze still blew. The ocean bellowed, and there was plenty of evidence of the gale. There was no gloom in the seamen's camp, however.

"We nigh banged that box into a ball, Eli, but nary a crack," said Blades. "We dumped it into a hole, like you said, and dropped a bit o' rock on it."

"Show me," Maxon retorted.

They took him by a roundabout way, for with the sun came life on the plateau, and eyes were keen.

"See anything of a boat, Eli?" Lammas inquired anxiously.

"Not a sign," lied Maxon. "I nearly got nipped by the tide, too. Had to spend more hours than I liked under Flencher's house. Where's the chest?"

They had not cheated him—yet. No use pulling rough stuff until that boat was found. But they had agreed to cheat him, as they had resolved to cheat one another, the difference being that they had talked over his case together, but not their own. There lay the steel box, sadly disfigured, but not anything like a ball. Oh, no! That steel box showed a few rock scars, but scarcely a dent. Proof enough, to Maxon anyhow, that it held something very worthwhile.

They left it and went to breakfast. Each watched the other now with furtive eyes. Had a boat appeared then, knives that were carving food might have leaped to carve other flesh. After breakfast they separated. It was too much strain to keep together. Tug Lammas stood on the highest rock, ragged, bewhiskered, dirty, already making his plans. Sydney! That was the place to spend cash. He knew a fine Judy there, a barmaid, golden haired, and not hard to know. Only trouble was, she had a way of changing her men when their cash gave out. Well, she wouldn't change Tug Lammas for any homeward bounder again. He'd be the permanent homeward bounder, and when there was a change, he'd make it.

He scanned the sea. Suddenly he stiffened. Involuntarily he uttered a shout, and the others came running. A sloop was beating up for the channel in the reef. Maxon half drew his pistol. Each man's hand flew to his knife, and all stared into one another's eyes. It was Maxon who laughed, putting back his gun.

"New deal, laddies, eh? No use having a row among ourselves, with a lot of strangers arriving. What are you going to do? If we try to take that chest away, if the sloop would take us, there'd be explanations to make—if not worse. Am I right?"

Silently they watched the vessel tack.

Up in the house the shutters were flung wide, and air and sun poured in to sweeten the moldy dampness of the gale. Flencher hovered about the room where Gytha bent over the bed. Mrs. Peruvio had chatted brightly for an hour, and Flencher had cracked his fingers and joked like a boy in his gladness. But she was moaning again in agony, and nothing eased her.

The resources of the medicine chest were exhausted. The poor old heart was too weak to carry on the fight. The moaning ceased, and Flencher entered the room. None dared speak. He had driven Peter out with foul words. Now

the old woman was telling him something, something which dragged terrible curses from him. Silence now. He bent over her like a statue of torment. In the sudden strained hush he turned to the door, and even his enemies, who hated him most bitterly, could have pitied him then. Gytha gently covered the woman's face. She went up to Flencher, and her eyes fell before the anguish in his.

"I'm sorry, Luis, she's gone," she whispered, and thrust out past him so that he might not see her own distress.

Peter came running in, and she avoided him, shutting herself in her own room.

"Where's Peruvio?" cried Peter, full of news.

He had seen the sloop entering the reef channel. The door was slammed in his face, and behind it he heard the striding of a man in frenzy and the terrible words of a godless man challenging God.

CHAPTER XX

VISITORS FOR FLENCHER

GYTHA and Peter watched the sloop come to anchor. They had tried to assist Flencher in paying his last sad debt to the dead, and fiercely he had refused their help. Gytha was cast out and scorned as if he had never seen her; but resent it she could not, having seen his agony. They watched him from a distance, while keeping an eye on the sloop. All the brown people had vanished, as if trained to do so on a strange vessel's arrival. The settlement lay silent as a graveyard.

Flencher appeared on the veranda, carrying the dead woman as a father might carry a child he loved. She was straight and rigid. No ghostly sheet enfolded her; he had wrapped her in her gaudiest robe, and above it peeped the grotesque head of Gytha's doll, forever clamped in those mad hands that yet were so delicate. Glancing neither to right nor to left, Flencher stepped into the trail leading to the waterfall and stalked out of sight with his burden. Like shadows the blacks fell in behind him. It seemed scarcely wise or safe to follow him. Peter led Gytha away from the house and took her to a point from which the whole of the lagoon was visible. They looked down upon the landing, and the jubilant welcome of Tug Lammas and Bill Blades, and the other two men.

"I suppose we ought to go down and embrace our rescuers," Gytha said without enthusiasm. "Somehow I don't feel a bit keen about deserting that poor insane man in his trouble."

"I'm not so sure they are rescuers," said Peter, taking out his glass. "That vessel looks to me as if she's pretty badly hammered by the gale. I don't see Maxon—though those fellows of ours are capering as if they recognize old pals. Hullo!"

"It's a woman, isn't it?" said Gytha, suddenly interested.

Where a woman was, another woman might find a friend. Peter was muttering. There surely was a woman, and a striking looking man—tall, lean, with very striking eyes.

"Gytha, that's Flamette! Flencher's girl! And the tall chap is the same one Flencher pitched into the dump with a broken arm. They were both on the wharf when we left Suva—hopping mad, too. Peruvio turned Flamette out and hove her clothes ashore when he kidnaped you. Here's trouble, sure's you live, and I don't think you'd better stay here. I'm going after Peruvio!"

"Don't be hasty," Gytha urged. She gripped his arm; her face was pale, but she was thinking ahead of Peter. "They can't refuse to take us away. If you bring Flencher now, he'll murder everybody to relieve his feelings. He'll burn their boat as he burned his own, and we'll never leave this place alive. Peter—"

"If that woman comes looking for Pe-

ruvio, Gytha, I don't believe any man on earth dare face her. She'll be a fury, and she's backed by that lean devil with a broken arm to collect for, not to mention our men, who are just yearning to pull Flencher into little bits. They have guns. They're looking up here. They're coming. Look at that!"

Flamette stood on the beach, a blazing bit of color. Her pretty face was hideous with passion; she shook her fist at the cliff top. Her voice carried like a bell, and it was evil.

"She'll kill you," said Peter. "It's no kissing bee she's on. I wonder where Maxon is. Do you suppose he's found that boat too? I mean ours. Let's go down there. We'll be safe then, if those people mean trouble. This isn't our war, anyhow. Come on."

"I'm going to find Peruvio," Gytha declared. "I have no reason to feel grateful, but he's treated me well, as far as his queer nature let him. I won't stand by and see his place wrecked while he's away on such an errand as his."

"Oh, let him fry! Didn't he carry us off like rabbits? This is our chance to slip him. Maxon's sure to be down there, watching his own interests without taking chances, and his interests are ours. If the darned fool wouldn't insist that he's going to find that treasure—"

"There is no treasure!" retorted Gytha, tugging at his arm.

Quickly she told him about Flencher's little hoard, and the gift of it to her. Peter stopped in the path and stared at her.

"Then why bother about him?" he demanded. "You earned it, if ever woman earned anything. That was his little joke. When he played generous like that, he believed you'd never have a chance to take it away! Where is it? Let's collar the swag and hop to the boat with it now. Maxon will give up then. You can pay him well to help us get away, and the rest—"

"It isn't mine. I couldn't take it. But I'm not going to let somebody else steal it while he's away on such an errand as he is now. Come on, Peter! Listen, here they come!"

PETER followed her because he would not let her out of his sight now trouble threatened. They reached the turn in the path which hid them from the house, and looked back to see Flamette marching at the head of a roaring gang like some vixen.

"Flencher! Show yourself, you dirty dog!" the girl screamed.

The lean man took stride for stride beside her, and apparently his broken arm had not implanted in him any fear of Flencher Peruvio.

"Shake a leg, Peruvio! Here's some old friends to see you!" he yelled, stamping on the veranda steps.

No sound came from the house; the timid gained courage; Flamette entered, and the men thronged around her. In a moment they were in every room.

"Hurry, Peter!" said Gytha, and they ran along the path, not knowing where to look.

The waterfall droned loudly in their ears before they dared call out to him. No answer came. They ran on, through the glowing mist of the fall, calling his name. Through the wild beauty of virgin jungle all starred with crimson and purple flowers they hurried. No response came to all their shouting, though they flung caution to the winds now and shouted with all their power.

"Do you think he'd fling himself down there with her?" Gytha wondered.

They stood on the verge of a sheer crack in the rocky core of the island itself, into which the waterfall poured its shattered torrent. All about it great leaves grew, and humming birds flashed in and out of the cups of blooms large as cabbages. There was a coolness here, almost a chill; looking down a crevice, one saw nothing but a misty gloom. The waters, rejoined after long tumbling,

roared down there among the bowels of the peak. It was just the sort of place such a man as Flencher might well select to bury his dead; but that he was the sort of man to bury himself while men sought his blood, Peter did not believe.

"I don't think that of him," he said, shaking his head. "He might climb down there to leave her body; but he must know that sloop is here. I told him. Believe me, he'll make them pay for his hour of misery!"

"He never heard a word you or anybody else said then," Gytha protested. "Captain Peruvio!" she called desperately.

"They're looting your house!" yelled Peter hopefully. But there came no response.

"Let's go back and try to hold them up until he comes," he proposed. "I hate leaving that mob unwatched while that money's there. It's yours—anyhow it's not theirs—I'm not going to see you robbed by a gang of toughs like that."

Again they traversed the path, peering, calling. They came to the home turn, having failed to find Peruvio.

"Oh! They've set it on fire!" breathed Gytha, and sat down helplessly.

Peter glared through the vines, and for the first time in his life felt like killing for killing's sake. For the first time he saw some excuse for men who kill in hot blood, and could even find a plea for cold blooded murder.

Flamette was like a she-devil, running about with a blazing, oil soaked brand. Inside the house sounded the crash of wanton destruction, and men came tumbling out to curse the woman for her haste, then to laugh at her thoroughness. As they emerged, they pulled down the veranda screens and flung them into the flames.

There were bottles in evidence, too. Blades was already crazy drunk. Long a forced abstainer, he drank brandy from the bottle neck like beer, and its action was swift.

Some of the men had guns, and a volley was poured into the fire with much yelling. Then, when Flamette stood back, brushing her hair from her eyes, beaten back by the flames she had started, a man stepped up to her and said something which gave her renewed ardor.

"You fool!" she shrieked. "Why didn't you say so before!"

She flung down her torch and started toward the cliff path.

"Come on, Yule! What we want is down the cliff!"

"It isn't the money they're after," said Peter, watching them tumble pell-mell over the edge. "Stay here while I take a look inside."

He stole by a back path to the house. Flencher's room was gutted, the flames dying down. Peter guarded his face with his shirtsleeves wetted at the rain barrel, and peered inside. The studding of the walls stood, and bits of board remained. The room was a smoldering furnace, but there lay the bottom section of the sea chest, just where Gytha had said. Could they possibly have missed the loot and fired the place out of mischief?

Bits of tinder all over the place indicated the completeness of their rummaging, but the base of the chest had not been dragged away. Had Flencher fooled Gytha by showing her a little part of his hoard, and had the *Scorpion's* crew known all along about the other part? Was that why they had been so docile? Was Maxon about that business now?

Peter got bodily into the rain barrel, soaked himself and dashed into the ruined room. The rubber soles of his sneakers melted and stank as he scuffed aside the base of the chest. The iron ring in the floor burned his hand until the smell of flesh mingled with the smell of rubber. Frantically he tugged at the board in the floor, and dropped it clear of the cavity.

The fire drove him out, but he would not leave that open hole now. Treasure

there might be—he had no interest in that; he had not joined Flencher's ship with any idea of treasure hunting—but here was Gytha's property, whether she wanted to claim it or not. Let the mob take the treasure, if they could find it—this they should not take. He took hold of the rain barrel, wriggled it through the broken wall and dumped it over the floor. Steam blinded him, but he battled through it to haul out the canvas bags and the little box. He stuck the box inside his shirt, ran to the top of the gully in which lay the boat he had found and gently rolled the bags down.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WATERFALL

FLENCHER bore his burden along the bush path, and the blacks followed him like mutes. It was curious that in his moment of agony only the fierce blacks stood as friends, while the docile, happy little brown folk took no part in or gave heed to his grief. Perhaps he was right when he said they were fit breeders for his laborers. Surely they appeared to be no fighters, presenting no opposition to the wrecking and burning of his house.

He paid no attention to the blacks, yet they bore him company as if they loved him. One, whose back still bore his livery of stripes, trotted at his heels like a dog. He left the path when the waterfall's roar was near, striding over rough ground, bearing his burden as if it had only the weight of the silly rag doll. Never once did he permit vine or twig or branch to touch the dead form. His own face was scratched and bleeding, his hands torn, but that quiet, placidly smiling dead face he held so close remained unmarred.

The blacks stopped when he stood so near to the waterfall that the sprays pattered upon him. Beyond that point they appeared reluctant to go. The spot was weirdly lovely, like a green cup in the lush jungle, with the gray peak soaring skyward from its lip, the great crevasse like the ax cleft of giants, the crystal torrent tumbling down like jewels in the sun. The place was a riot of color with purple bougainvillea and scarlet hibiscus and waxy frangipani.

Flencher laid down his burden and took off his jacket, wrapping it reverently around the dead face. Then he took it up again and stepped straight through the rushing curtain of water. The blacks uttered a concerted moan as he disappeared, and stood shivering in superstitious fear. That was for white men—and only one white man—not for them. They squatted on the vivid grass, staring gloomily at the place where he had vanished. Through the bush they heard Peter calling, and had no ears for his message.

Humming birds darted among the flowers and the sprays, scintillant and gay as elves. Larger birds filled the bush with song. The blacks heard and saw only the fierce downfall of water and the pit beneath.

After ten minutes Flencher reappeared through the waterfall and, without a word to his followers, strode back along the path. He moved like a man under a spell, oblivious to the world. The blacks began to sniff the air. They turned a corner in the trail and saw the smoky film in the sky. Their mutterings must have reached him, yet he walked on without a word.

Presently he stepped out on to the settlement level, and from the bush crept the brown people, their eyes big with wonder and fright. Still Flencher seemed unaware of the ruin before his eyes. He stood amid the blackened wreck of his home; he could see, if he would, the sloop in the lagoon and the boat at the shore. Far away on the horizon a dark blur looked more like a smoke smudge than a cloud. Yet he gave no sign that he saw any of it.

Not a curse, not a word left his tight, pale lips. Right through the charred flooring he scuffled, kicking up sparks

and smoke, standing where the door of his mother's room had been until the heat scorched his shoes. He lingered to touch the charred frame of the bed, and his face twisted into a mask of torment. He never realized that his shoes and his clothing were smoldering until his flesh was roasted within them.

In Gytha's room was complete destruction. The gaudy brass of the bedstead alone remained. The dressing table, with its pretty silver and ivory, was a blackened reminder of the feminine daintiness he had so often furtively admired. It was like the spirit of some young martyr burned at the stake. He muttered to himself. This girl had done him service such as no woman had ever offered him before. She had cared for that old madwoman as he had never believed a stranger could care. He had put himself outside the law to bring his mother to a peaceful haven; but without Gytha's tenderness his work had been in vain. Now this.

It woke in him a rage that his grief had almost conquered. In her last coherent words his mother had told him how she came to upset her lamp. She had opened her window, resenting Gytha's chiding, and there she had seen a face, right at the window. It was Eli Maxon's face. The sudden fright had caused her to run backward, and the lamp had fallen. Gytha had smothered the flames, saving the house, but unable to save her. She might have let the fire do its work then.

He seemed dazed. This present ruin somehow refused to detach itself from that upset lamp. But turning to where his own room had been, he was jerked into full cognizance of the facts. There was the cavity in the floor. Of his chest nothing was left but the base, but that had been shifted from its place. The hole was empty. Its metal lining was hot. Everything seemed crystal clear now. Maxon! He had fired the house. He had stolen Gytha's store. He had frightened the old woman into her death. Eli Maxon!

Flencher shuffled across the plateau, for his feet were burned more painfully than he knew. The blacks fell in behind him, and to them he uttered a sharp order which sent them swiftly away by another trail to the beached boat from the sloop. The boatman, standing by, saw them, shouted hopelessly, and tried to shove off; but the heavy boat was too well beached. He floundered into the sea, and a throwing spear kept him there. That boat would never leave Flencher's Island.

When Flencher reached the edge of the cliff, he stood for a minute looking down. Below him he saw a fight.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TREASURE CHEST

MAXON and the *Scorpion's* men watched the landing of the sloop's boat with mixed feelings. Already the seeds of a fine conflict were sown, but here was a situation needing cooperation. Maxon knew of the longboat, the others didn't. Here on the beach lay a fine boat; anchored in the lagoon a fine sloop was waiting. Even Maxon looked with a covetous eye on that sloop. Yet sloops were not to be had for the asking, even on Flencher's Island. He did know where to put his hands on a real longboat; and if he could only get the four men of the *Scorpion* to leave him for a little while, he might still get clear with that precious chest.

"Tug," he said, "if you fellows will agree, we can make this a real getaway. It's a kid's trick."

"I heard about kid's tricks before, Eli! What's the new game?" Tug growled.

Tug was not clever. He knew that somehow there ought to be use made of that sloop, whose people even now were crunching along the shore, their voices sharply audible.

"Up to some'at, I bet!" muttered Blades.

Bill distrusted Eli Maxon. Bill distrusted every man whom he could not understand. Maxon smiled patiently, though he knew how little time remained for patience.

"It'll have to be done snappily, Bill," he said. "You fellows hurry and meet that crowd. Lead 'em to Peruvio. Then sneak back and take their boat. There's only one man left standing by it."

"Leavin' you here, eh?" Tug Lammas snarled, with a sidelong glance toward the hiding place of the chest.

Bill's teeth showed in a crooked grin. The other two men crowded Maxon.

"Don't waste time, you fools! Take the boat and bring it around here. I'll be waiting for you with the box. You'll have the boat, and, if you want to, you can shove off and give me the butt end of an oar for my share. I'm trusting you. Get on with it, or you'll lose the chance at that sloop!"

"He's right, boys!" Lammas said, and ran to meet the strangers.

The rest glared their doubt at Maxon, whose open smile scarcely deceived them; but they followed Tug Lammas, and Maxon darted out of sight as the two parties mingled. He watched them go up the cliff path and chuckled again at the double triumph in his hands. That particular crowd was bound to give Flencher a hot time. He had his own idea of a warm time, and nobody was to share it. When the last man's back rose over the cliff top, Eli hurried to the hiding place and took out the chest.

It was a shivery sort of progress. First he had to cross the ridge, and the uproar on the height sounded very near. Maxon risked much for speed, and with the chest to carry and the loose footing caused by the overlay of the landslide, he more than once stumbled and all but slid into the sea. But once under the overhang of the cliff he breathed easier. Around the bluff he could see his way clear almost to the gully. Almost. The tide was at half flood, and he was forced to take a higher road than he meant to, but there was only one nasty piece to negotiate, and that was the edge of the gully itself.

There was the small matter of food and water for the boat, of course; but even that could be left to take care of itself, if he could only get that boat clear. While the silly fools were bumping about the rocks with the sloop's boat at one end of the island, he would coolly sail in the longboat around the other end and get his stores aboard the sloop itself. Not a man remained aboard her, as he had seen from the islet. The road grew rougher, and the chest was not as light as he had found it at first; but the gully was near at hand, the wind blew freshly and offshore, the world lay ahead and it was his.

He came to the steep rock which alone hid the boat from him. Beyond it—voices. Far behind him—voices. Above, silence. Setting the chest down, Maxon stole forward, peering around the rock.

PETER helped Gytha down the slopes of the gully, and they found the way perilous. The rains of the gale had washed the rocks clean, and their smooth surfaces offered little to hold on by. But down there at water's edge lay the sea grape tree beneath which their salvation waited for them. Peter could see that the green screen had been disturbed—by the storm. Over the last bit of hard going he took Gytha's canvas bag from her and left her both hands free. Then in a scurry and a tumble she landed at the bottom and picked herself up, laughing nervously. She was more shaken by the events of the past few hours than she cared to admit; never had the prospect of leaving Flencher's Island seemed so supremely desirable.

"I've got a tin of cabin biscuit in the boat and water in the kegs," Peter said, tearing away at the boat cover.

He picked up the canvas bags and set them on the stern seat. He told her what to do to help him, and she removed

the chocks from the rollers. There was a boat compass in a locker. Everything seemed to be in fine shape for a voyage, even for a pair of inexperienced sailors.

"I know a bit about sailing a boat," said Peter. "If I knew as much about where to steer, we'd be in clover. But I did get a rough idea of the direction that plane flew off in, and we'll sail the same way. Planes must land somewhere—" He broke off suddenly. The boat had started to move. The simplicity of it all carried him away. "Go on breaking away this vine," he said. "I won't be five minutes, Gytha."

He started toward the steep climb again.

"Oh, Peter, don't leave me!" she cried. "Where are you going?"

"I forgot some specimens I rather value," he called back. "I may as well take them. They're rather rare—"

"Come back! They'll see you—"

"They're gone, and I'm not afraid of Peruvio any more. Shan't be long."

He was scrambling up the gully like a goat. It was easier going up than coming down had been. Gytha gazed after him in anxiety; then when he went over the top she busied herself about the boat, unable to wait with quiet resignation. The boat was at the sea edge, moving easily. Already she could imagine clear water between herself and the terrible place.

She stopped with a shock, and her heart thumped madly. A man's head was jutting around the cliff, two glittering eyes staring at her. Maxon stepped out, and the glitter in his eyes became a humorous gleam.

"All ready to go, eh?" He smiled, laying a hand on the boat's gunwale and his eyes taking in the two fat canvas bags. "Food?" he inquired, nodding at them.

She was relieved. She had no fear of Maxon. Rather she felt that he might be of great help.

"There is food, yes," she said. "In a tin. Peter put it there. Water, too. He'll be back in a few minutes. I'm so anxious to go. This awful island—" She looked up, longing for Peter to come.

Maxon's hands felt the bags, and his expression grew suave. She met his quizzical gaze.

"Peruvio gave those bags to me—for nursing his mother," she explained. He nodded.

"So you're hurrying away with 'em? I see. I'll come with you, Gytha. Just hold on a second. I've got a contribution from Flencher too."

He laid his pistol on a thwart. It was Gytha's own gun, taken from her case by Jovial Jinks long ago, stolen by Maxon not long after.

"If you see Flencher coming, give him a couple quick!" he warned her, and started back to pick up the chest.

THERE were at least two men of the *Scorpion* who clung tenaciously to the suspicion that Eli Maxon was no philanthropist. When Tug Lammas and Bill Blades led the sloop's crowd to the settlement, and those other two men carried on toward the boat, they exchanged ideas in discontented tones and found complete agreement. So when the man on watch at the boat pulled a gun on them, and warned them that Captain Yule of the sloop and Flamette hadn't come on any relief expedition, but had come for their rights, they wasted no time in argument. They turned back.

"I never trusted that Eli!" growled one.

"Tug and Bill was too quick to agree wit' him!" the other rejoined.

They crunched through the broken shell and coral, and the hubbub from the cliff top reached them clearly.

"I bet Maxon's found Flencher's boat—"

"We was sent away for a blind—"

"We can handle Maxon, and—"

"Ain't no call to share wit' nobody else!"

At the ridge the tide was running.

Already the strong current that had scoured out that passage in the years gone by had begun to loosen and remove the light débris of the slide. And now the more solid parts of the ridge were hidden. Crossing was risky, and not as swift as when they crossed only a short while back. But midway of the crossing they could see that Maxon was not where he agreed to be. They took the rest of the passage at a shambling run, and made for the hiding place. It was empty.

The islet had the impressive feeling of desertion. They could hear plenty of noise from the island; there was a rising spiral of haze which soon grew into smoke up there. They started at a run and made a circuit of the islet, and at the outermost point they saw Maxon's stumbling figure far along the island shore.

"There goes the swine!" said one.

"He's got the boodle!" said the other.

They plunged upon the shaky crossing of the ridge and reached the island, vanishing around the point at the moment when Tug Lammas and Bill Blades, aware that they were outsiders in this gang of Flamette's and whatever came of the raid was not going to be to their profit, conceived much the same idea as their two mates had, and left the spoilers of Flencher's house to steal back over the edge of their own more vital concerns.

"Look at 'em! The dogs!" swore Tug, pointing to the two men trailing Maxon, whom they could not see.

"Bloody robbers!" said Blades, very drunk. "In wit' Maxon, they are, Tug. C'm on!"

They took the cliff path in a headlong slide and fell into the sea before they regained their footing. Then they plunged along after their recreant mates. They saw them come to a place and stop; saw them stoop and pick up the chest; and covered the distance between at a sailor's gallop. Getting near, they picked up rocks. The possessors of the chest set it down and scrambled for rocks; and like blind, brainless furies the two couples clashed in bloody conflict with the battered chest tripping them as they fought over it.

Maxon came upon the scene and shoved into the fight with his shoulder. He picked up the chest, hoping their insensate fury would give him time to carry it away; but every man of the four saw him, and already they had marked him out their enemy. As one man they turned upon him. The chest went clattering among the rocks, and Maxon went down under a flurry of rock fisted blows, frantically feeling in his empty pocket for the gun he had left with Gytha. His face cut open by a bit of coral, he went toppling into the shallow water of a rock pool and the four men grabbed at once for the chest.

AROUND the point from the ridge streamed Flamette, with Yule and all her roaring crew. The girl was disheveled and smoke smudged; she screamed hoarsely. One after another two of the last of her crew stopped in their headlong rush and fell to the rocky shelf. Spear shafts stuck up from them as they lay, and no man had seen the shafts sped. Another spear missed the next rearmost man, and he went blundering on, innocent of his escape. Frizzy heads moved along the edge of the cliff, keeping pace with him and his fellows.

Now the men of the *Scorpion* turned to meet the new onset, and again they fought as one man against a common enemy. But Flamette and Yule had guns. Bill Blades went down cursing, covering the chest with his body. The girl dragged him off, and Tug Lammas kicked at her savagely. Yule shot Tug, and Tug sat on a rock, looking foolish, and his mouth hung open to pour out the thoughts that boiled in him as his life went out.

The fight got too thick for shooting. Friends were mixed with foes, all arms and legs—a swaying, swearing huddle of men; and, between them, Flamette and

Yule dragged the chest clear and went swinging along with it, bound for their boat, leaving the fight to whoever might win it.

Maxon picked himself up and raised his head cautiously. He saw the chest swiftly carried out of sight. Between it and himself was a tangled bunch of men, two of them from the *Scorpion*, hammering blindly at the others who fought to keep them from following. Somebody saw Maxon's head, and fired at it. That was an enemy, anyhow. Maxon dropped back into the sea, unhit but convinced that so far as he was concerned that treasure chest was gone.

He fell back upon Gytha. She had the boat, and she had two fat bags of coin. If the chest were not for him, he could make out nicely yet. Only he must get back to the boat before any of these hellions saw him; and he must beat Peter to it. There was not going to be enough for Peter, even if he had got that chest. There surely was not enough in those two bags. He crept along until he dared lift his head again. The last of his men had fallen. The rest of the sloop's crew were making off, and seemed to be uneasy about something above. A spear sticking out of the shoulders of one of them gave them a hint, and they broke into a run.

Maxon hopped to the rocks and darted to the boat. Gytha stood there with terror in her eyes, having heard the battle sounds.

"Come on, my girl! Quick's the word!" he panted, and shoved the boat forward. "Get in! Come on, lively!"

"Wait for Peter!" she protested, holding back the boat. "He's just coming—Mr.—Maxon!"

He lifted her into the boat.

"To hell with Peter!" he snarled.

He gave the boat a shove, which set it afloat, and flung one leg over the gunwale. Peter was halfway down the slope, calling. He finished the distance in a long slide and landed beside the boat, breathless. The specimens were strewn all along his trail, and he let them lie, for Gytha had snatched up the pistol from the thwart and was pointing it right under Eli Maxon's nose.

Maxon, though surprised, had no great fear of women of Gytha's sort. Flamette was more formidable in his code. He slapped at the gun, knocked it from her hand and scrambled aboard, dumping Gytha into the bottom of the boat. A jerk almost upset him, because Peter laid hold of the gunwale and hauled the boat in to ground on a rock.

If Maxon had any foolish notions regarding Peter, he soon lost them. Peter leaped upon him like a panther, and set about him with fury. It was not Maxon's day. He groped for the gun, and Peter's fists pounded at his face. He touched the gun, and Gytha kicked it from his fingers. Their combined weight held the boat grounded, and the rising tide only shifted it higher.

Maxon punched Peter on the nose and made his eyes water. But Peter had fought Flencher Peruvio, and was not to be stopped by any mere mate. Gytha was not going to lose that reward, earned from Peruvio as no woman had ever earned reward before. Gytha was angry too. Maxon had wanted to help her get away, but she wasn't so crazy to get away with him that she would let him leave Peter behind—Peter, who had done everything man could do for her. She braved the scuffling feet, trying to get the revolver. They rolled over her, all in a heap across the thwarts.

Peter and Maxon were locked in a rough and tumble grip. No boxing about this. Knees, thumbs, skulls; gouge, butt, cripple. Peter rolled over with a grunt, almost beaten. But he got to his knees and lifted with all his power, his arms about Maxon's waist. They tottered, the boat lurching, and crashed halfway over the gunwale. Then Maxon's hand found the gun. He tried to bring it up to fire at the body against him, and together they rolled over into the sea.

Down the gully slope came Flencher,

and Gytha saw him. She screamed when the men went overboard, picked up an oar and tried futilely to shove the boat off. The boat, released of weight, bumped, almost floating, but still beyond her strength. Then Peter emerged, near the bows and, never looking to see what Maxon did, put his shoulder to the craft to help Gytha. He saw Flencher, through salt blurred eyes, and shoved desperately. And Maxon scrambled up on the rocks, gun in hand, peering for his antagonist. He saw a grim figure coming toward him and fired.

The shot took Flencher in the breast, and red stained his linen. The boat floated, and Peter fell into it; but Flencher had no eyes for it or its people. He walked toward Maxon, his hands reaching out, and again Maxon fired. Again a red stain oozed through the shirt; but Flencher advanced like doom. A fleck of crimson was at his lips, and he coughed as a third bullet thudded into his vitals.

Maxon backed, his eyes full of terror; and as fast as he could press trigger he fired twice, and Flencher stumbled. But still he came on, and Maxon pulled trigger now on an empty chamber. The boat floated out of reach, Peter fumbling with the mast, Gytha with an oar.

A bubbling cough burst from Peruvio's shattered chest, but no other sound escaped him. He was reaching, reaching for the man whose face had killed his mother. Maxon leaped back toward the sea, and Flencher's hands were almost at his throat. He flung the pistol into Flencher's face; then those hands found him, and Maxon tried to fight. It was useless. Flencher died almost as he reached his enemy, but his grip never relaxed. He drew himself closer, fell with all his weight forward, and they rolled over the rocky edge together, plunging down into a rock pool ten feet deep. They sank to the bottom, and lay on the white coral sand like a monstrous thing of the sea, the living fighting the dead, and the dead the victor.

"Oh, Peter!" gasped Gytha, sitting down and suddenly feeling sick.

Peter said no word. There was a sinking feeling at his own stomach. He stepped the mast and dragged up the sail in some fashion. The offshore breeze filled it and the boat sailed out past the rocks, right over the place where the two bodies lay in a knot.

Echoing through the island solitudes, faintly came the metallic *clack-clack* of chain cable going out. Neither Peter nor Gytha heard that. They dared not look at the island. Their faces were set, their gaze fixed upon the ocean ahead.

CHAPTER XXIII

FLENCHER'S JEST

A GRAY war vessel steamed into the lagoon and sent an armed boat ashore. Landing beside the sloop's boat, the officer met Flamette and Yule, swinging a steel chest between them, followed at a stumbling gait by three beaten and thoroughly frightened seamen, who tried as they ran to wrap their torn shirts around ugly wounds of spear and rock.

"Where's Peruvio?" the officer asked.

"In hell, I hope!" Flamette answered shrilly. "Come on, Yule. Let's get out of this!"

But the officer had other ideas. He gave an order, and his men took the chest and placed it in their boat. They also took Flamette and her men, and the pistols of the patrol warned them against making trouble.

"Take them on board," the officer ordered.

Then when the boat was on its way he led his party along the shore in the direction from which Flamette had come.

They found and followed the path leading above, and as they approached the settlement a few frizzy haired blacks vanished into the bush. The burned ruin of Flencher's house gave them little pause; when the floors were ripped up, no hiding place was left. Thoroughly and

swiftly the party searched the settlement, and, if they found no trace of the man they sought, they saw plenty of evidence that he had done work there and that his work was not bad. They came upon the gully and found a trail of dried plant specimens. The evening was drawing on as they slid down to the shore.

Halfway down the officer spied Peter's sail, fast dwindling, just visible beyond the islet.

"Get back on top and keep that sail in sight," he said to a seaman; then he led the rest of the party to where fresh red stained the rocks. It was a short search to find that grim knot of death lying on the clean sand. A strong swimmer undressed and dived with a line; Flencher and Maxon were drawn back into the fading sunlight. The officer examined them intently.

"I'd like to have got him alive," the officer remarked. "Nothing to do now but bury both of them. Who's this other fellow?"

"Looks like Maxon, sir. Bit puffed up, but that's his dial all right."

"H'm. A clean-up with little satisfaction!" muttered the officer. "I wonder who's in that boat then? Sure it's Maxon?"

"Sartan, sir."

The officer turned.

"All right, lads. Haul 'em aloft and give 'em decent burial. It's more than they've given a good many."

It was dark when the gray warship passed out through the reef entrance and set a course in the direction in which the boat was last seen. The sloop sailed far astern, manned by men from the patrol. Flamette and her men sat disconsolate, robbed of the treasure chest. The treasure chest was in the engine room, and artificers were progressing toward opening it. As the darkness deepened, and the night wore on, the vessel steamed slowly in zig-zag, her searchlight going, seeking the flying sail of Peter and Gytha's boat, whose course was but vaguely known.

IN the boat the old tale of fools and angels over again. Peter and Gytha saw their sail swell with wind, and their boat surge through the darkening sea, and believed themselves adequate to sail the world around. Peter really had a close idea of the direction that plane had taken, and when he saw his compass lubber line and his estimated point coincide he felt satisfied. Had he known more, he would have trusted less.

The boat leaked. He expected that. She was dried out. Gytha bailed in her turn, while he steered; bailed until her back felt as if it were breaking. Peter had to steer until the boat rounded the islet; then, when he settled on his compass course, he gave her the tiller and relieved her at bailing. He was puzzled because a strong tide, running between island and islet, carried them away to leeward in spite of the compass. But, when out of the current the boat held her course, he felt safe again.

But the leak did not tighten up. When he had bailed her nearly dry, she steered well; when Gytha bailed and was weary the water began to rise and then the boat steered like a dray. Gytha looked very beaten when the sun dipped into the sea.

"Shall we go back, while we know where the island is?" he asked her dully.

"Go back? I'd drown out here with you, Peter, but never do I want to see that terrible place again! We'll carry on," she said.

Peter grinned and held out his hand; after taking it like a man, she broke down and cried. It was the first time he had seen her give way, and it drove shyness from him. He put an arm around her in comradely fashion, and she let her head rest on his shoulder.

"Peter, it might have been that Maxon!" she whispered.

"Or Peruvio," he said.

"Peruvio—he never made me feel like Maxon did." He felt her shudder.

The stars came out. Peter bailed incessantly for an hour. Gytha dozed

uneasily, worn out. The boat steered herself, and he bailed until his body screamed with cramps. Their supper of water and biscuit was poor fare to bail a boat on; but he must carry on now, for the island had passed from his ken. What with drift and darkness he never could have figured out the way back.

He bailed. When he could no longer lift the calabash bailer he waited to see if the leak had lessened. It was much worse. The water spurted like fountains in several places. He was frightened. The bottom must be falling out. He woke the girl, told her the truth and, without a word of complaint, she took the bailer and fell to work on her knees.

Long before the early dawn Peter knew it was hopeless. They sat in water. The wind had fallen light, and had changed its direction. The boat rolled on a deep swell. She headed all around the compass. Somewhere Peter had read of men in open boats, whalers, who when their boats were smashed by a whale used to lash the oars across the gunwales to keep it afloat. It seemed easy, as read. Peter lashed his oars, and he and Gytha sat awaiting events. The boat filled rapidly now, and he had expected a miracle at least. Then he remembered reading that seamen stopped leaks by dragging sails under the hull.

"Then let's do that," said Gytha. "We can't quit, can we?" She laughed, a shaky, brave little laugh.

They lowered the sail. Peter added the mast and gaff to the lashed oars; then they tried to drag the light canvas under the boat. It refused to sink. It filled with air and rose about the bows like balloons. They prodded at it with the tiller. Then he unlashed an oar to submerge it. They almost fell overboard in their struggles; but they pushed the canvas under and dragged it beneath the bows. It covered but a part of the hull; still the water gushed in. They dragged it to another part, and the water spouted in the place they uncovered.

"We can do no more," Peter said, exhausted. "Let's eat a bit of hardtack. Then we'll bail as long as we can stick it."

They ate, drank a little water and bailed. The boat sank steadily until only the lashed oars and spars supported her. Then Gytha skimmed the bailer far out over the shimmering sea and sat beside him. She took his cold hand.

"Peter, old fellow, I'm sorry I dragged you into this."

"Dragged me?" he croaked. "Who shoved the boat off?"

An hour passed. They were chilled. Phosphorescent gleams swirled through the water they sat in. Peter put his arm about her again, and she held him close to her. They had no more to say. Nothing was required. They had started on this astonishing adventure together, without choice; they must finish it together the same way. Comrades in distress. And, chill though the dark hour found them, each felt a subtle warmth within that grew out of the conviction that the end would not be so terrible because they were together. Gytha put her wet face up to his.

"Kiss me, Peter, and don't let go of me," she whispered, then let her head fall against his face and sat still, her cold hand fast gripped in his.

Just when the first gray paled the eastern black, a searchlight beam swept the sea. It swept far beyond the boat. It went through the full circle and began again in a smaller sweep. It touched and passed over the waterlogged boat. Peter opened his eyes, conscious of something queer, and saw the beam swing over the ocean, missing him. He tried to yell. His throat was dry.

He tried to rise, and his cramped limbs refused him. He spoke to Gytha —then was glad that she did not hear. He did not speak again, following that light with burning eyes.

It was swinging again. Something splashed in the sea beside the boat, and a great streak of light marked the patience of a sea tiger. He shivered.

That would be the end—sharks; no doubt of it; and all because a mad skipper had been crazy enough to think he could carry off people—

Now the light fell squarely upon the boat. Peter tumbled the girl into the water and stood up to wave and yell. He fell beside Gytha, his yell a parody of sound. He babbled of a light, and sharks, and a ship that was passing in the night. Then the light flooded over him and remained steady. A siren blared, then silence again, but the light remained as the dawn appeared.

"Take it easy, my lad," a voice was saying. "Look out—it's a woman!"

Then strong hands lifted the castaways, and a swirl of fading phosphorescence marked the foiling of a sea tiger's patience.

GYTHA and Peter sat in the chartroom of the gray patrol. Warm and dry in borrowed garments, their blood pulsing again under the influence of hot grog, the commander of the vessel regarded them quizzically, waiting until he felt they could talk. On the table sat two fat little canvas bags. Presently an engineer officer appeared with a stoker carrying a square steel chest, expertly opened with a key made in the engine room.

"Set it down, Chief," the skipper said.

The engineer grinned, waiting expectantly. The skipper turned to his guests.

"You people must have been in a hurry to quit that island," he said. "You left Peruvio's loot behind after all."

"There wasn't any loot," Gytha answered sharply. She controlled herself and smiled. After all, these people had saved her life and Peter's. "Those bags you found in the boat were given to me for nursing his mother. The treasure tale was a joke."

"If you call it a joke," the skipper retorted. "Whatever it was, and whatever he gave you those bags of coin for, he never meant you to get away with either. Half of the bottom planks of that boat were sawn through. And I see you don't know what is in those bags." He rolled down the openings of the fat canvas sacks and let Gytha and Peter look in. There were about fourteen pounds' weight of solid English copper pennies. Perhaps enough real cash to pay the first instalment on a gramophone.

"Peruvio had a nice taste in jokes, Miss Crosbie."

"Joke's right!" ejaculated the engineer. He raised the lid of the chest, and stood aside for the others to see. An officer peeped in through the door, as curious as any. Peter's and Gytha's eyes glistened. This was the loot that had turned a ship into a slave hulk and made an island mad.

A littered heap of jigsaw puzzles lay under a sheet of paper covered with writing. The skipper thrust his hand deeply into the jagged bits of wood, his face a study. Halfway down the depth of the chest he began to fumble, and his eyes hardened. He turned the puzzles out on the floor, and drew out half a dozen quart bottles, filled and sealed. He was puzzled, which was no joke. His steward opened a bottle. The skipper smelled at it. Another bottle was opened, and given to the engineer to smell.

"It's water," he guessed. The skipper gingerly tasted some.

"And salt water too!" he said. Then to the steward, "Break these bottles and make sure there's no trick hidden away in them. If this stuff caused all the murder I saw back on that island, Peruvio undoubtedly was crazy—but somehow I don't believe it!"

"Nothing in 'em, sir," the steward reported.

"Put everything back in the chest, and stow it somewhere for evidence," said the skipper, and sat down to read the writing on the paper.

"Whatever damned fool reads this will be rewarded as I want him to be. More than one would kill me for my treasure, which

exists only in their brains. My savings I have given to Gytha Crosbie for kindness shown to me and mine such as none in the world ever showed me before. In place of my poor bit of cash, I put in this chest enough puzzles to keep all hands puzzling until the last boatswain pipes. If it is dug up and taken away in the boat I have prepared for the finder, that will be the end of it. If it is opened before it is lost, I hope the finder will be able to appreciate Flencher Peruvio's little joke.

—LUIS PERUVIO

"Mad as a hatter!" the skipper remarked. "I'm almost glad we found him dead. The other chap wasn't mad, though. I'm sorry to have missed him, the scoundrel!" Lighting a cigar, and giving Peter one when he saw his hungry look, he presently asked, "How on earth did you people get mixed up with that gang?"

Gytha told him. She gave him a brief account of the madwoman. Peter added some word of the real attempt to create a home.

"Poor devil!" said the skipper. He took his guests below and showed them two tiny berths where they might rest. Standing in the doorway, he added, "When a plane landed in Suva from Cape York and reported queer doings on an uncharted island, the rumor went around that it must be Flencher's mysterious island. There was already a lot of noise about a raid on another island and all the young people carried off. I picked up radio orders and steamed as fast as I could to the position given by the plane; but that sloop got the rumor ahead of me and beat me to it. It must have been quite a battle, and for what a prize! But the tale's not told yet.

"Besides breaking into the madhouse to steal that old woman, and killing one or two attendants to do it, there was a big robbery job against Peruvio. A lump of a reward out for him too. We'll run back to overhaul that island again. You hadn't gone far, you know. If you'd kept your sail up, we'd have found you much earlier. Turn in and get some sleep. Flencher's joke isn't convincing to me. I'll rouse you out when we anchor and you can show me all of the island you know about."

He left them, and when alone again Peter produced the silver box and gave it to Gytha with a grin.

"I didn't forget all your interests, Gytha. I kept the box out of sight. These are yours anyhow. They'll pay you for lost time and shattered nerves."

He opened the box and rolled the pearls out on her bed. She touched them idly, shaking her head.

"They may be a joke too, Peter. Anyhow, they may be stolen. I don't want them. Take them to the captain."

She picked them up and offered them. Peter drew back, frowning.

"Not I! They're yours, Gytha. Surely something's due you."

"Then I'll take them myself," she said decidedly, and sought the skipper on the bridge.

His eyes gleamed at her offering, which he took eagerly.

"I was expecting to find something like this when we set out to find your boat," he said. "Sure this is all?"

His eyes, so kindly before, regarded her rather gravely now. Then they twinkled again, for she was a forlorn figure on that breezy bridge in her borrowed clothes, barely covered by a cotton blanket from the bunk.

"They're all I have ever seen," she replied. "I never saw anything else besides the two bags and the silver box these came in."

"Silver box? Where is it?" He was keenly interested. She started to go below to get it. He followed her. "I'll save you another journey," he said.

So they entered the quarters and came upon Peter, bending studiously over the bunk.

"Oh, look at this!" Peter cried. "It was under the cotton in the box."

Gytha glanced down. There lay another jigsaw puzzle, a small one, roughly made and apparently amateurish. The skipper was scrutinizing the silver box.

"Another silly puzzle?" said Gytha.

"This looks like a bit of the loot we want to find!" said the skipper, then turned to watch Peter. Peter had almost completed the puzzle before they appeared. It consisted of only about twenty pieces, and offered no difficulties.

"There!" announced Peter, and stood aside in triumph.

On the face of the puzzle was drawn in pencil a rough sketch of the waterfall. Beneath the picture the words, Walk Through.

"Do you know that place?" the skipper demanded.

"Of course!" answered Gytha and Peter in a breath.

"Then we'll go look-see," stated the skipper with decision.

He left them, but all thought of sleep had gone from them. They exchanged glances, and gradually Flencher's joke took on greater significance. They watched for the island as keenly as any man of the patrol crew. When it appeared they went on deck, and Gytha sought and gripped Peter's hand. Her face was eager, her eyes alight with rising excitement.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SECRET OF THE WATERFALL

THE officer stood before the gushing spout of crystal water, regarding Gytha whimsically. Peter was drenched, seeking an answer to the riddle of the jigsaw.

"Walk through!" quoted the officer.

Gytha shivered. The sunlight was vivid overhead, but in the glade, amid the lush tropical bush, there was a coolness and a vague sensation of hush that even the waterfall could not entirely shatter. As for the water, it offered little but a thorough soaking to anybody venturing beyond its fairy mist.

"Oh!" Gytha cried in a moment. "He's gone!"

She ran forward, but was afraid to follow Peter, who had disappeared right through the falling column of water. The officer took her by the hand, and encouraged her; and Peter's voice, like a voice from a grave, called them on. They walked boldly into the water, and stepped immediately into a dimly green-lit cave, which droned with the muted roar of the cataract. It was a few minutes before eyes suffused with the brilliant outer light could discern objects within; but a noticeable odor was a plain guide to the thing they speedily found.

"Another joke?" muttered the officer.

"It's his mother!" gasped Gytha. "We never saw where he took her."

The floor and sides of the cavern were glistening with a form of deposit which apparently fell with timeless slowness from above. The sides were gleaming from the same cause. Every object in the place was filmed with the pearly coating except the dead woman and the thing she lay upon. Peter and Gytha stood back; but the officer was there to see. And when he had gently lifted the body to the floor, he dragged into the light a stout teakwood box on which was forming a film like that which covered floor and walls.

"Undoubtedly the man was insane—but cunning too," he remarked, and stepped through the waterfall to the sunlight.

Peter led Gytha after him. They stood around the chest; and out of the woods flashed a spear, quivering in the earth between them. The men accompanying them fired into the trees, and the officer drew his revolver. Silence fell, and no human shape could be seen.

"Whatever he was, his blacks loved him," said Gytha. "I do hope you won't set out to kill them for this."

"Poor devils," the officer muttered. "Fire again, high, and scare 'em off until we have finished."

THE chest was opened beside the ruins of the house, and Gytha and Peter walked among the native huts, while the officer examined the contents. At

the head of the gully Peter saw his scattered specimens, and began to gather them up. Peter never let his beloved plants move far from his thoughts. Gytha stood gravely regarding the settlement. It had been so utterly fine a creation, growing though it did out of brutality and evil. It was almost heartbreaking to think of all the good that had been done for these little brown people going for nothing. And, as she stood there, the little brown people stole from their hiding places and came around her, their big soft eyes sorrowful.

"You no go, missy?" a girl pleaded.

A man, whose hurts she had tended on the *Scorpion*, looked closely into her face.

"Them fella do hurt for you, missy?"

"Hullo! What's up now?" demanded Peter, hurrying up, fearing for Gytha.

She silenced him with a gesture, and her eyes were wet.

"Them fella friend," she answered the man. "They take me home."

"Home?" The native women echoed the word together. "You no stopalong we?"

"Perhaps I'll come back," Gytha said hurriedly and, taking Peter's hand, hurried away.

These people were lovable as children. She dared not remain longer with them. The officer was waiting for them.

"You've done a good job after all." He smiled, tapping the big teak chest. "This is the swag we've been after for more than a year. The riddle of Flencher Peruvio has died with him. I have no doubt that he deliberately fixed that steel chest so that Maxon could find it; and with that in view he also fixed the boat for Maxon too. He never intended Miss Crosbie to go in that boat. Maxon could take it, and drown. If he ever opened the chest, he'd be fooled. But Flencher did mean to give the secret of the real booty to Miss Crosbie, and I'm rather sorry to disappoint her." He glanced at her regretfully, but still smiling. "However, she'll be able to buy a lot of pretties with the reward, to compensate in a small way for the kidnaping. If you've seen enough of Flencher's Island, let's go."

It was not many days till Suva was opening out ahead. Gytha gazed at the land with mixed feelings. Peter chattered gaily. After all, he had brought away a nice lot of strange specimens that would be useful when he wrote the book that had come into his mind since starting on his adventure.

"I wouldn't mind spending a year on that island, Gytha, under a bit different conditions," he said. "I never saw a place so rich in new plant life."

"I'll invite you, Peter," she answered surprisingly. She turned a pink face to him, smiling at his stare.

"*You* invite me? You mean to say you're going back there, after what's happened? I thought you were crazy to get home."

"I have no home—no real home, Peter. I wanted to get back to civilization, of course—but I don't ache for it now, somehow, as I did when I was being forcibly kept away from it. I'm going to lease that island with the reward I'm to get. The skipper's promised to report all the progress that's been made there. I shall try to carry out the plan which after all was really fine—that little community, and—"

She stopped, the color deepening on her face. His eyes were fixed on hers, and slowly something of the truth dawned on him. After all, out there in the sinking boat, when both expected to drown, she had asked him to kiss her. If in death, why not much better in life? He reached out a still hesitant arm and she met the gesture helpfully, oblivious to the amused gaze from the bridge.

"You mean you want me to come too?" he stammered.

Then wisdom surged over him. He made the embrace a good one.

"I want you to ask me properly, Peter," she whispered from the shielding cover of his shoulder. And so he did.

THE END

My Baptism of Fire

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

IT WAS in Cadiz, a city that resembles a flock of doves hovering over a golden beach, that I achieved my desire to secure a commission as an army officer. The *Maine* had just been blown up in the harbor at Havana and, whoever may have been responsible, it was certain that war would be declared between Spain and the United States. It was in the air. Everybody felt it. It was a woman's voice that set me on my way.

The Duchess of Navas did not think it possible that I should miss the wonderful opportunity which the war would offer me. She knew what military preparation I had had in Belgium, and assured me that, as Spain was the fatherland of my ancestors, I could not draw back. Wouldn't I like a commission as an *alférez* in the expeditionary force that was about to leave Cadiz?

As the handsome duchess was no less a person than the wife of the Capitán General of Nuevo Leon, her arguments made me an *alférez* and I had connected with my first war. A few weeks later I was fighting under Generals Toral and Vara del Rey in Santiago de Cuba, near El Caney.

General Wheeler, the dashing little ex-Southern general, was an able soldier. The American troops kept drawing nearer to Santiago. General Toral had ordered two battalions of volunteers to fill a gap near El Caney. As a member of this force—I was in command of a detachment—I lay behind a fallen mango tree, with my revolver in readiness, listening to the breeze, which is a good courier. The breeze now brought me interesting news. There were *machetes* hacking away at the wire fences.

A shot rang out. The bugler at my side moaned softly and rolled over. Then hell broke loose. The *insurrectos* rose from the ground directly in front of us. They dashed ahead like a band of phantoms, waving their *machetes,* firing their revolvers as they advanced amidst shouts of *"Viva Cuba Libre!"* My Spaniards countered with an equally enthusiastic *"Viva España!"* and jumped up to resist the attack.

The fire spread out all along the line, in rhythmical volleys; but in my own small sector it had become already a hand-to-hand struggle, with *machetes,* bayonets, gun butts. Revolvers were fired pointblank in our faces. Cries of rage and pain mingled with the clash of steel and the dry reports of the firearms in a shrieking, thundering medley.

I had emptied my gun and was hacking frantically away in the dark. It was my first fight at close quarters, my baptism of fire, and it all seemed to me like a mad dream. Some one clutched at my knee. I hit out blindly. And when I lifted it to strike again, I found an enormous negro towering over me, more like a shape carved out of the night than a human being. With a hoarse cry of *"Viva Cuba Libre!"* he sprang forward and brought his flashing bushknife down in a swift stroke. Somehow I managed to parry the blow, but it had been delivered with so much force that I merely succeeded in deflecting it, and the weapon gashed into my right forearm to the elbow. As I sank to my knees, I reached for my sword with my left hand and, before the patriot had time to strike again, my Toledo blade pierced his throat.

And thus I began my active apprenticeship in the stern school whose philosophy will ever remain: *"La guerre c'est la guerre."*

Satan

By HENRY G. LAMOND

JOE THE RAT and Blue Billy were battling up the Georgina River, Western Queensland. They were attending the race meetings of the outback towns. With Red Hugh they had cleaned a pot in Boulia, keeping Sweetheart in pickle. Traveling easily, they were camped on a waterhole above Herbert Downs and below Glenormiston Station, in the heart of the brumby country.

"Wasn't it about here somewhere that Leary lost Dotson?" Joe asked.

"Uh-huh," Bluey replied. "He was takin' him up the river five year back. He'd just come out of trainin' from th' south. He was takin' him up to serve as a stallion on Walgra Station. He was th' best stallion what ever come into the back country. He got mixed up with a mob of them brumbies about here. Dotson broke loose. He ain't never been seen since."

"How about lettin' th' mares go an' have a roll?" Joe asked. "There ain't any bush horses in sight. We can watch 'em."

Sweetheart was the pick of the whole team. Clean built, clean bred, black as night and fleet as the wind, she reigned as queen. She was the one straight thing in the lives of her two owners. She had been picked up at an unregistered racecourse near Brisbane. Bluey and the Rat had pooled their resources and purchased her cheaply on account of a recent disqualification. Her name was changed; her record was faked; her speed and stamina, her pluck and her breeding remained unimpaired. An empress in her own right, a queen in her bearing in spite of her besmudged past, Sweetheart stepped free as the halter was dropped from her. She ran to her mates, whinnying as she went, and she rolled in kittenish glee in the dust on the ground.

The horses fed about the flat, nibbling at the short picking and glad to be loose. Suddenly they stopped, lifted their heads and gazed up the course of the river as their animal instincts told them of a strange approach long before those drumming hoofs sounded to the two men.

Straight as a swooping hawk, and clean as a striking snake, a brown horse burst through the fringe of coolibah trees skirting the hole. His head was out-

stretched, his mane was flying, his tail was held stiff in the wind behind him as, belly to earth, he sped like a charging comet toward the little cluster of horses on the open flat.

When that strange horse burst from the sheltering trees, both the Rat and Bluey bounded to their feet. Open mouthed and with startled eyes they gazed, and everything happened so quickly that they had no time to do else but swear.

"Dotson!" Bluey ejaculated. "Sufferin' smoke! Ain't he a horse! I only seen him once. I'll never forget 'im."

Two mares were on the outskirts of the mob nearer Dotson. He ignored them. Faster than lightning he struck, quick as a fleeting thought he acted: a chop, a bite, a muffled squeal, a snort, a scurry of dust, a double drumming of galloping hoofs—and Dotson was racing away in the distance. And ahead of him, being driven as the horse behind her desired, urged to fleeter action by those chopping teeth, not daring to oppose the iron will behind those striking fangs and snake-like head, the incomparable Sweetheart galloped where she was driven. . .

Twelve months later Sweetheart stepped out from a clump of gidyea and started for water. Beside her a little fellow, newly born, floundered on uncertain legs. The way was long, and the ground was hot. Those searing stones burned the tender little hoofs, and those endless miles took toll of his energy. But the little fellow was game. He bit on the bullet and stayed with his mother. Dotson, the Derby winner, unconquered and unconquerable, was his sire. His mother, under another name, had almost a full page to herself in Volume XII of "The Australian Stud Book".

Black was the foal—black as night. Not one white hair showed on his body, and black as the very fiends of the nether regions was his temper. He had the blood of heroes in his veins—pure, unsullied—and sooner would that little fellow lie down and die than surrender.

Mother and foal were absorbed in the mob. Gradually the little fellow found his footing and joined the play of the other foals. He grew. The limitless miles over those stretching plains developed his muscles. The sharp stones and jagged pebbles trimmed his hoofs and gave them a hardness akin to flint. That sweet grass nourished his body and that pure air fed his lungs. No horse in all that region could hold his sire for pace. No mare there was as fleet as his dam.

He played. He fought. He fed. In his play he outstripped the others. In his fights, sham though they were, his small teeth lifted streams of hair from his antagonists; his striking hoofs and lashing heels gained respect and fear; and implacable and unbending he swayed others to his will.

TWELVE months later Sweetheart went again to her own patch of gidyea, and when she stepped out another colt, slim-legged and deer-like, came with her. It was a filly, a sister to the black colt which waited without the timber for his mother's return.

The colt went confidently to his mother. She repulsed him, snapping at him with biting teeth and swinging her hindquarters with a twitching tail which foretold a kick. The colt backed away, wondering at this new manner toward him. And even as he retreated the little usurper went to its mother and took the drink which had been denied the colt!

With a scream of rage he rushed. Rearing, he brought his miniature thunderbolts of hoofs crashing on the filly's loins. Squealing with insensate rage, he plucked at that twitching body which lay beneath him. He wolfed it with his teeth, shaking and worrying it. He spun and lashed the body with his heels. He wheeled again and charged. Then the mother came to the help of her progeny.

The colt never hesitated. That demon in horsehide, who was to be known as Satan, reared and fought his own mother for his rights. He screamed in his fury. He screamed with rage let loose. He ig-

nored her chopping bites. He swung above her and gripped her wither in his strong teeth. He stood and chewed, shaking as he worried, and the mare stood helpless before him. Then he swung his hindquarters across her chest to hold her, and he went to her flank and took his drink while the mare stood above what had been her daughter.

Another three or four months passed. Then, as the knowledge of sex came to him, its urgings took the colt. When the first throaty gurgle of love sounded from him, a horse on the opposite side of the mob lifted his head. Again the colt whinnied, and the horse cleaved his way through the mob. Glistening of eye, with his head held high and with his tail arched, the colt was stepping about a mare while he told his love. Full and rich he called it, and his body almost seemed to swell in the majesty of maturity, when a rushing tornado of hate struck him. It was Dotson.

Dotson could afford to ignore the colt while he was only a baby. But there could be no rival to his kingship. As he swung through the mob in his haste, his heart swelling with the indignity of another horse coming among his mares, he saw the rival who tried to usurp his position—it was an immature colt. Against a colt he would not stoop to fight. In a surging rush he came, and, like a whirlwind released, he struck the colt with his chest, lifting a furrow of flesh and hair from hip to wither with his teeth as he came.

The colt went down, rolled over once and scrambled to his feet. Any other would have fled. But Satan, the son of Sweetheart, clean in his blood and fearless in his breeding, charged even in the face of death. Like ripping lightning he struck, and even as a David of old he attacked a Goliath.

Dotson was nonplused. He could not fight this boy who assailed him. It would be ignominious to treat him as an antagonist. But the fellow wanted fight. At least, Dotson could chastise the chap for his presumption. He did. He bundled Satan over once more. He caught him as he rose, his teeth closing on the nape of the colt's neck, and he threw that pestilential combatant from him. He lifted raking bands of hair and reddening strings of flesh. He kicked that charging fury, sending it breathless and squirming to the ground. He reared and wrestled with it. He chopped it to ribbons and he tore flaps of skin as his heels grazed it.

And every time, bleeding and tottering, weary and panting for air, dust begrimed, bespattered with blood and dripping from his wounds, but clear eyed and fearless, Satan came again to the attack. But at last he had to desist. He stood sullen and braced, his head hung low, his eyes red and snaky in their fire, his ears lopped and his tail jammed. When Dotson essayed to hunt him from the mob he stood, his rump to his aggressor, refusing to move and ignoring the agony of those tearing teeth.

But when Dotson had rounded up his mares and driven them to water the colt knew better than to attempt to rejoin them. He followed behind, calling to them from afar. When they fed out from water the colt stayed behind and picked up with others of his age and sex which had been driven out by jealous stallions.

When nearing two years of age Satan left his mob. His urgings prompted him to hunt alone, and to form his own brood if he could. He paid attention to the road by the river. A traveler was riding that road. Among his horses were two mares. Satan joined the troupe which followed behind at a distance. With hoof and tooth he discouraged most of those following gallants; and when the traveler camped for the night but two other young stallions besides Satan were watching.

As soon as the man had hobbled his horses and gone to the hole for water, Satan charged the mares. With chopping bites he drove one, and with a will of the devil's own he harassed her till, in one flying bound, she broke her hobbles and raced free in front of him. He

raced on, caring nothing for the other two colts which had stayed with the mare which he left.

"A black fellow, a devil of a 'orse," that traveler had exclaimed later, when recounting the robbery.

"We've seen him before," his listeners agreed. "We calls him Satan."

OTHER travelers testified to Satan's prowess and daring. The horse was gradually building a brood of mares. Once he was chased by a sighing bullet which flicked dust beside him as he raced. Once he had to fight for his life when he had inadvertently stumbled among a mob of mares with a draft stallion. The teamster, the owner of the horses, ran out with a whip when hearing the noise.

He lashed the stallions apart. Satan, seeing the dreaded man standing beside him, had fled without shame. Another time he was luckier. He raided a drover's camp on its way up the river. From that collection, when he had sorted out the geldings, he added ten mares to his brood.

Early in his fifth year, a mature and splendid specimen of a horse. Satan looked proudly over his mares. Thirty of them there were—thirty of different colors, of various breedings, of many brands and owners. And every one of them was a stolen mare.

Satan roamed his country. He kept a jealous eye over his brood. None escaped him. There were occasional fights —mere harmless bickerings which were a scurry of dust, a flashing of heels, a squeal or two, a crash of hoofs as they pounded home, and then nothing.

Wild stallions did not fight for the love of fighting. There was too much to lose. Life was at stake and, what was more than life, the loss of the brood to the victor. But always the stallions attempted to steal mares one from the other. Coming in to water, the stallion always led his mares. There might be other stallions at the water who would cut off the leading files. Apart from that, with the urge of thirst driving them, there was no danger of a mare's failing to follow.

Leaving the water, the stallion always took the rear of the mob. Mares with their thirsts satisfied might be tempted to stray and feed out from the brood. The stallion had everything under his eye ahead of him, and from behind, where the attack might come, he placed himself.

The season was dry and outside waters failed, forcing the mobs to converge on the few good holes left. Dotson led his brood from a drying water and worked them down to Waukaba Hole. He had forty mares, and the glorious Sweetheart was still the queen of the brood. The foal following the one killed by Satan had been a colt, coal-black in color, and he in due course had been hunted by Dotson. The following foals had all been fillies. That colt foal, in common with his elder brother, had sought his mates from the road.

"There's that Satan horse at his work," one traveler had said to another as a black body in all its beauty had flashed by some driven mares.

"That ain't Satan," his companion objected. "Satan's an older horse nor him. That's only a youngster lookin' for mares. Satan's got his brood."

"He's a full brother, then," the first replied. "If that ain't Satan it's Pluto. They both belongs to hell, an' they can fight it out between 'emselves who's boss. That's Pluto."

Pluto he was, and as Pluto he gained a fame second only to his renowned brother. They never met; but Dotson their sire, with Sweetheart the queen of his brood, their mother, brought his mob to Waukaba where Satan was running.

Dotson was bringing his brood out from water, letting them string along the pads which led out to feed. Full and rich and rare, clarion clear in its vibrant tone, a neigh rang out from a mob coming to water. There could be no mistaking that call. It was a challenge to the lord of the mob, an invitation to the

brood itself, a curse of hate and a song of love combined. Dotson heard it and needed no second bidding. He lifted his head—old with the age of sixteen years—and he neighed his challenge in reply. He was full with a long drink, and he was slow in consequence. But that mattered nothing to a king when his kingdom was at stake. He brushed past the laggard tailers, swept up the wing of his mob and stood out clear. Brown and muscular and noble in his bearing he stood. As a bronze statue he stood between his mob and any possible danger.

From the lead of the coming mob a black stallion showed. On his polished coat the sunlight played flashes and ripples of fire. He turned and faced his mob, halting them, and then he stepped out a clear thirty yards toward the bronze statue opposing him. It was Satan.

Both stallions looked at the other's brood. There was a mob worth gathering. Each knew it was to be no squealing skirmish, and to both came the premonition that this was a fight to the death. It is doubtful if either recognized the other. Each knew he had a mob to protect. Each knew he had a mob to gain. Both knew there was a life for sale.

Dotson raked the dust in clouds above him. He lowered his head and snorted, sending twin spirals eddying about his ears. He squealed his power and rage, and he swung to look over his mares. He, gallant old master that he was, knew the etiquette ordained.

Like striking lightning Satan fought. Like a lick of black flame he flashed, and in a whirling maelstrom of fury he fought. He knew his power. He gaged his strength. He felt his spirit—the clean spirit of the thoroughbred handed down to him through countless generations and not contaminated by so much as one drop of base blood. While the older horse was yet pawing the ground, this raging fury burst on him. Dotson quivered before the shock, and on wide spread legs he braced himself for a recovery.

But recoveries are not allowed between fighting stallions who wage war in earnest. Satan was on him, rending with snapping teeth, smashing with flint-shod hoofs, striking with bolts of death. Before this cataclysm of fury Dotson stumbled. He fell and, half tripping in falling, he sought to recover himself.

Screaming his rage and yelling his hate, Satan bore the old horse to the ground. He kicked and bit and gouged. He tore and ripped. He lashed and struck and pounded.

Gamely Dotson staggered to his feet. He was torn and blood stained, breathless and dazed. From his open wounds great streams of scarlet pulsed and ran in rivers down his sides. But he was game. Though his breath came in panting gulps, and though his brave old heart must have known death was riding his shoulders, he staggered to his feet. He stood for a second, and then he carried war to this raging fury opposed to him.

But it was all in vain. Dotson was growing old. He had just drunk deeply. He shook as those raking broadsides rocked him as he stood, and he gave at the knees as he tried to charge. Then one bolt of destruction took him over the heart, and the brave old horse wilted before it and dropped to the earth. His race was run. That hero of the turf and monarch of the western plains met the death he had so often handed to others, and it was his own son who administered it!

Satan swung from the battle. He rounded the new mob of mares and merged them with his own. He led them to water, brought them out from a drink, and with a hoarse scream of triumph, a blatant call of conquest ringing with victory and lust, he went through them. With arched neck he strode among the mob. With much whinnying and throaty gurgling he smelled them. Those which did not find favor in his sight he

hunted. He rounded his mob again, drunk with pride and intoxicated with lust. He merged them in one mob and he drove them before him to his feeding grounds.

But the horses were too thick. They were destroying the feed which the station wished to reserve for cattle. They were polluting water by their rolling and pawing. Brumby shooters were brought.

Satan was taking his mob from water. The pads led past a thick clump of gidyea. When almost opposite that patch a rifle spoke and a yearling dropped, screaming, to the ground. It was shot through the shoulder—not killed, only wounded. That is the devilish cunning of the trained shooter.

Almost coincident with that crack from the rifle the mob sprang to a gallop to race away. The mother of that foal, daring death itself for the sake of her progeny, returned to her screaming young. That mare was one of Satan's favorites. When she returned the stallion raced to the lead of the mob, swung them, and brought them back again to the favorite who refused to leave. The rifle spoke again, and another foal dropped. The mob scattered. The stricken mothers returned. Satan blocked the mob. Four times that happened, and four foals lay screaming on the ground. The last to drop was a black colt from Sweetheart.

The rest of the brood scattered. But one mare remained. Fearlessly she stood above the body of her helpless foal. High she held her head, her eyes staring, her ears pricked, her nostrils distended, and defiantly she snorted her anger. It was Sweetheart—Sweetheart the incomparable. And as she stood a bullet took her, a tearing agony in its passage seared her, and a great choking of blood rose to her throat. But she stood there, a statue of beauty and pluck, defiant of death. Suddenly she reared as she fought for breath, and in a crumpled heap she dropped to the ground and lay still.

That was the end of Sweetheart.

Satan went on. He collected his mares and drove them down the river to Tippita Hole. Hot rage tinged with fear burned within him, and his mares were demoralized. Satan's autocracy would have been questioned had he attempted to take them back to Waukaba. He led his mares to new pastures.

Three days after being at Tippita, and just as the brood was accustoming itself to its new surroundings, Satan, at the head of his mob, was coming in to the hole when another brood approached from the opposite direction. The stallions of both broods obeyed the law; they raked dust and threw it over their backs while they each stood out clear from their mares. In billowing waves the dust rose, and, as the stallions drew nearer to each other, each paused occasionally to rake further dust. If not actually a challenge, it at least served as a signal that neither horse was afraid and that each considered himself as good as the other.

Satan may have been in the wrong. That was not his country. That was not his waterhole. But to Satan's imperious mind all country was his, all horses must acknowledge his suzerainty, and by his might he held the right to go where he pleased and to take what he desired. The base upstart opposing him must be taught a lesson. In any case, he must surrender his mares.

The other stallion advanced as willingly as Satan. His volume of dust was as great. His neighs were as full and as blatant. And then, as the wind blew the dust clear, he stood out and faced his opponent. Black he was, shining with condition, arrogant in appearance and rich in breeding. It was Pluto.

For the interminable space of full twenty seconds the horses faced each other, standing like graven statues and swelling as they stood. Each horse was sleek and muscular; each was in the full flush of vigor and strength and had a spirit worthy of his namesake. Death might come to either of them: Dishonor

could never touch them. True sons of the one sire and dam, they stood forth to battle for supremacy, to juggle with life and to hand out death with fine impartiality.

Closer they came, closer and closer till a bare ten feet separated them and the twin clouds of rising dust merged in one and floated above both gladiators. Each swung slightly to one side, the better to view his brood behind him and yet to give him command of his antagonist. Then in a flash of time both horses sprang into action.

Twin yells of hate screamed through the air. Eight galloping hoofs threw streams of dust behind them. With a shock which shook the ground beneath them, they met. They reared and struck, twining their forefeet one with the other while bared teeth smashed against bared teeth as each sought a hold. They dropped to the ground, squirming; and as they touched they spun with the speed of light and lashed with fury driven by rage and impelled by hate. The sharp crack of hoofs smashing against bodies sounded, and scream answered scream as they turned furiously again and closed.

In that devilish medley hell was let loose. Death rode expectant, and two lives were offered in forfeit should they fail. They struck with snapping teeth, ripping and tearing; they wrestled as they reared, each striving to bear the other to the ground; they gripped and worried and shook; they lashed and mutilated. There was no cessation. Those fighting furies, endowed with the same blood and cursed with similar spirits, would fight till one dropped, till life was spent, and so long as one could stagger to his feet.

Satan bore Pluto backward. He reached over as the other horse was struggling for a footing, and he sank his teeth in Pluto's wither. Through tearing hair those teeth pierced, through shrinking flesh and crumbling bone. He lifted his head and shook and, as he lifted, his teeth came together with a metallic clack which jarred him to his toes. And even as Satan drew his head away a great gap showed in Pluto's wither, and from that place which had been flesh spurts of blood sprang in the air like a playing fountain and ran down the stricken horse's shoulders.

It was the end. Pluto might fight while he could stand on his feet; but that great drainage of blood and that crippling wound would bear him to defeat. He struggled on, and even as he fought his efforts became aimless, and gradually he sagged at the knees and sank to the ground. From his shoulder great gouts of red blood spurted, and from his nostrils sobbing breaths shook his body with convulsive heaves. It was the end.

SATAN turned from his beaten foe and commenced to collect his new mares. One there, Pluto's favorite, came to meet her new lord. She advanced from the brood and offered her nostrils to his. Coquettishly she flirted her head, and softly she squealed when Satan came to caress her.

Pluto struggled to his feet. He stood with his head hung low, with his tail hanging listlessly, with his loins arched in his agony, and he panted in great gulps as the blood poured from him. To his ears softly came the call of his favorite mare. He braced himself, looked about him, and he held his head high. He tried to move, and his legs trembled helplessly. He heard his mare's call again. Pluto threw aside his wounds. He forgot everything, and remembered only that he was a horse—a stallion with a mob to own and protect.

Like a rushing avalanche he charged in his fury. Like a whirlwind of hate he surged. A fiend incarnate, he swung to the attack.

Satan, dallying for a moment in the delights of conquest, turned to meet this stallion who would attack him again. They closed. Amid spurting blood and in a welter of dust, sprayed

with reeking sweat and lathered in foam, the two horses fought. The yells and screams were stilled, and in silence, save for an occasional deep gasp or heavy grunt, the stallions shuffled in the dust and battled under whirling showers of blood. Snake-like in their actions, their heads struck, their teeth closed and wrenched, and tearing sinews and stringing flesh trailed from their teeth as they drew back for another lunge. Their hoofs flashed, and closed in and with heavy pounding they fought for life—for life and victory, for death and destruction.

Pluto was weakening. Disengaging for a second, he stood back, swaying on his feet as he stood, and the blood which had spurted from the wound on his wither now flowed a sluggish stream with but slight pulsations. He was weary and battered, begrimed and streaked with wounds. On his side one jagged rib stood out from his hide. Great strips of flesh hung from him, and from his body a patter as of steady rain dropped to the ground as the blood poured from him. But he was game. With one more devilish shriek he charged, and as he came he reared and struck blindly.

Satan, a gory spectacle, dived under that striking blow. His was the victory. He slipped in under the rearing horse. His teeth closed on Pluto's stifle, and with a wrench he heaved to lift and throw. That would be the end. Pluto would never rise again. And even as Satan took victory in his grasp, and while Pluto was staggering in the air to regain his lost balance, with a crack like a pistol one of those weaving forefeet snapped across Satan's back.

Satan staggered. He fought madly to recover, and then slowly he sank to the earth with a shattered loin coupling. He heaved and twisted and he gasped stertorously as he strained to lift himself. It was all in vain. Sitting there with his crippled hindquarters, his legs dragging limp and helpless, he reared himself on his front feet and faced his foe. He was done. He may have known it. But he would die game. No son of Dotson and Sweetheart could ever be a coward.

But the same blood which coursed through Satan's veins also was in Pluto. He also was a son of Dotson and Sweetheart. He also was above a craven. And he too knew that his race was run. For one second he looked at his beaten foe, life racing with time as he looked, and then he stepped forward to complete the work he had begun. And even as he advanced, while yet several feet separated him from his brother, he gasped once against the choking rush which came to his throat, reared as his mother had done before him, and he fell in a crumpled heap to the ground. From his nostrils and open mouth a great gush of blood came in a spurting flow, and Pluto lay still!

With frightened snorts and trembling bodies the mares drew near the brothers —one stricken to death, the other a corpse. They wheeled about them and whinnied. Some went to water and fed out on the plain. Others drew near the two stallions, and with outstretched heads and whistling breaths they stayed and watched.

Satan tried to raise himself. Recklessly he plunged and fearlessly he battled while the sweat stood out on him and poured to the ground. One stupendous heave he gave—one last great effort—and suddenly he went slack at the knees and sank to the ground. From his distended nostrils one last great gasp brushed the earth and blew funnels of dust away from them, and then with a quiver he lay still.

The last of the mares fed away without so much as one look behind her. Out on the plain a mother was whinnying to her foal. Across the river a blatant yell of a stallion sounded as he collected straying mares and merged them with his brood. And thick through the air were streaming ribbons of black converging on the bodies lying in the open to provide a feast for the crows.

The SPY

CHAPTER I

MYSTERY BEHIND THE RHINE

EVERY one at American Headquarters was convinced that the Prussian general staff was brewing some sort of monumental military mischief. The unusual precautions behind the Rhine to preserve absolute secrecy were eloquent of a major military effort. So far, the only leak consisted of several intercepted cipher messages which provided many theories but no facts.

Through a sleepless fortnight Captain Fox Elton had slaved over the baffling enigma of these ciphers. The fruit of his toil was a Teuton jumble of words, which recurred in half a dozen of the intercepted missives taken at varying points of the compass:

"*Vernichten Weg.* 3 Lyons 18".

They reduced readily into their English equivalent, "Destroy the way. 3 Lyons 18". But what significance did they convey to the scattered German agents to whom they had been directed? What larger mischief was the Prussian staff setting in motion behind its terse instructions to spies?

Elton had his own explanation of the numerals. 3 meant Agent 3, the operative in charge of Paris operations—his ancient enemy, Lieutenant Baron Erich Wolf von Strindheim. 18, he guessed, fixed a date, probably the 18th day of the present month, September. Place, Lyons. The mere fact, if it proved a fact, that Von Strindheim was charged with a part in the plan sufficed to convince Elton of its sinister importance.

Not only Colonel Rand, counter-espionage chief, but the other staff section heads were centering their attention upon the puzzle. Information of far reaching importance might lie behind those cryptic words, they opined. But, after recounting every possibility, the keenest minds of the staff put the enigma aside pending further developments.

The counter-espionage net had done a fine job of intercepting the messages; Elton, an almost impossible task in deciphering them. The first had been picked off the wires at Berne, Switzerland, by an American legation attaché.

at LYONS

A Novelette of the Military Intelligence

By ARED WHITE

The Berne officer had reported, at the same time, a migration of suspected Teuton agents through Berne, destinations undetermined. This report from Switzerland had leaped into importance when a message, identical to that intercepted at Berne, had been taken in the form of a cipher pellet from the hollow molar of a German spy runner near Belfort.

"*Vernichten Weg.* 3 Lyons 18".

The messages, in an ordinary German substitution cipher which used the key word "Lyons", did not vary. They said that and nothing more. Something, beyond doubt, had passed before; carefully guarded details of a plan which these cryptic messages merely put into operation. A high G-2 officer recalled that the simple word "*Friedsturm*" had been code symbol for the colossal German offensive on the Marne in July. Therefore, he deducted, "*Vernichten Weg*" might have an equally sinister import, once the mask of secrecy was stripped from the phrase.

Intercepts multiplied within the week. At Le Havre one was taken from an operative caught coming ashore from a neutral vessel. One was taken at Bordeaux, another at Marseilles. This wide distribution signified a spy octopus of long tentacles. Another, and longer, report came finally from Berne. Suspected German agents had been visiting the Austrian consulate at Zurich, disappear-

ing into the Zurichsee by launch at night. Again their destination was undetermined.

Since Elton, having reduced the cipher, was unable satisfactorily to penetrate its meaning, experts of the operations staff looked to the current military situation for a possible solution. That military situation was peculiarly delicate just now.

The Germans had been beaten badly at the second Marne and forced back across the Vesle.

Another great Allied offensive was in the making, intended to reduce the St. Mihiel salient and pinch off the whole German army in France and Belgium. The American part of that plan was to seize St. Mihiel, and later attack through the Argonne forest and drive past Sedan. Shortly thereafter the Americans were to project another great attack, with their newly forming Second Army, against the German citadel of Metz. For the development of this battle, another two million men were to be brought to France from the United States through the winter, following the jump-off set for November 12.

What was the German army doing to meet their desperate situation? Staff experts exploited every conceivable theory.

They agreed that Von Hindenburg could not afford to dig in on a shorter front and supinely follow defensive fighting. Reports had seeped in from behind the Rhine of growing restlessness and dissatisfaction among the Teuton civil populace. No matter how well disciplined the German people, they must have a show of military success to put their shaken courage through another hard winter.

Bulgaria was on the rocks; Ferdinand's surrender to the Allied commander regarded as inevitable—another blow to Teuton morale. The Italian front was carefully scanned. Austria had failed there in June—after almost succeeding.

Would imperial headquarters launch another human thunderbolt against the Italians, always a vulnerable front? But American, English and French reenforcements could be rushed by train through the Mont Cenis pass to prevent disaster there. Would Hindenburg mass another avalanche of flesh against Chalôns? The Allies were able to meet that threat all too effectively.

Experts at headquarters fretted and stewed over these problems in search of the meaning of *"Vernichten Weg"*.

COLONEL RAND grew weary and irritable under the long strain of research and speculation. He even spent several racking hours in checking through Elton's cipher breaking processes to assure himself there had been no error in deciphering the captured messages.

"We've got to get to the bottom of this thing somehow," the colonel fussed. "The chief of staff is checking me every few hours for developments. First time I ever knew you to be stumped, Elton."

"Yes, sir," Elton admitted, "but I'm in rather a large company. Our best minds are stumped; and I don't wonder at it, considering how little information we have to work on. The great trouble is, it might mean any one of a number of things."

Rand stroked his long angular nose with his thought-provoking index finger and stared at his youthful assistant.

"This inaction has dragged along far enough," he decided. "Do you think you might be able to pry something loose down in Paris?"

"If I thought it wise to leave Chaumont right now," Elton replied, "it would be for Berne or Zurich, not Paris."

"Berne? Why Berne!"

"I've only a theory, sir. It may come to nothing."

"Well, let me judge that, Elton. This is a time to consider every angle we're able to think of."

Elton debated the situation in silence

for several moments. The plan he had in mind as a last extremity was simple, direct, effective. But it involved risks and possible complications that Rand would not countenance, much less authorize, once he knew the details. Elton shook his head abstractly and looked at the colonel with an air of innocent detachment.

"It may not be necessary, sir," he announced. "Something may turn up to give me a much better trail; so my best plan is to sit tight at headquarters and wait."

"That's what we've been doing for two weeks—wait and debate!" barked Rand, whacking the desk top with his hand. "This is once where I'm willing to play any reasonable gamble, so speak up and tell me what you meant about Berne!"

Though his face was hollow-eyed and drawn from loss of sleep, Elton's unshakable poise was not affected.

"My best theory, sir, is that I sit tight for developments," Elton evaded. "Some loose wisp is bound to blow our way soon. I've never yet gone out on a blind lead, as the Colonel may recall. I'd especially dislike to go groping after such a man as Von Strindheim. I've got to know what I'm about next time I approach the little baron."

"You made a good enough job landing him in Paris last June," Rand taunted.

"That's just the trouble, Colonel. The baron will never play an open chance again where I'm concerned. Remember, he knows every trick card in the espionage deck. He's a master of disguise, he has brains, ingenuity, daring and caution. Why, he was out of Vincennes within ten days after I delivered him over to the French in June. Their agents have never had a glimpse of him since, although knowing all the time he was in Paris. I tell you, sir, my only chance against Von Strindheim is to learn his game, then devise some means of tripping him up suddenly. All we need is a little patience, Colonel. But, changing the subject, I was glad to hear you say you would be willing to gamble a little on this case. It encourages me to present a little request I've had in mind for several days past."

"Request for what?" Rand demanded guardedly.

"For the release to me on parole of a soldier named Pram, held in our prison at Paris. That is, of course, in event I have to have him. I'll be willing to vouch for Pram personally."

"German suspect, eh?"

"No, sir. Good American, though of Austrian descent. I've had him in view for some time because he speaks German like a native and I feel I can depend on him. The trouble is that he's been sentenced by a general court at Paris to twenty years' hard labor."

"Murder?"

"No, sir. Talking back to his lieutenant."

Colonel Rand's face hardened. There was a sharp rebuke in his eyes and voice.

"Elton, you surely can't expect to have a man of that stripe released from confinement, even for a few weeks!"

"Why not, sir? I've known Pram for a number of years. He's a bit high tempered and, if he talked back to an officer, I've no doubt he merely yielded to a rather widespread impulse. As a matter of fact, Pram used to be a first class yegg. But he reformed several years ago, and certainly showed his good intentions by enlisting for the war."

"Yegg? I'm not familiar with slang, Elton!"

"Prowler, sir. One who specialized in fingering safes. He's an expert at that game—opens them without powder; but he's a good hearted fellow, basically sound, who happened to get mixed up in bad company. He's one reformed crook who'll make good on the straight path."

"Make good!" sneered Rand. "Do you call insubordination making good? See here, Elton, I'm broad minded enough to overlook burglary, or even safe breaking, if a man has good stuff in

him and wants a chance to make good. But insubordination, such as you attribute to this fellow Pram, must not be condoned. With all the good men there are in France, there's no reason I can think of why you should want this rascal released."

But Elton insisted, using his final argument—

"Nevertheless, Pram might prove more valuable now than a whole brigade at the Front, under a plan I have in mind."

"Your plan?"

Elton took a reflective puff at his cigaret.

"It is better, sir, that I do not tell the Colonel. There's a saying among the Germans that Germany knows no law except the law of necessity. Sir, it may become necessary for me to invoke that law again, as I did once at Vincennes. If I do, I'm willing to accept the whole responsibility without in any way involving my seniors."

"And I'd much rather you'd let me in on the whole scheme," Rand asserted. "But since I know you'll not, I'll say I'd rather get a whole regiment to help you than ask for the release of this fellow Pram. His offense strikes at the very foundation of discipline and good order, without which an army is only an armed mob."

"But if he can now help strike at the foundation of the German Empire, it seems to me he'll rather even up the score. May I count upon your help in this instance, sir?"

Colonel Rand twisted and turned in his chair and again stroked his nose in reflection.

"If you insist it is necessary, Elton," he yielded reluctantly. "Under the circumstances, I'll place no obstacles in your way."

"Thank you, sir." Elton smiled. "There's still a chance that developments may make it unnecessary to use Pram. But if I do need him, it will be in a hurry; and I'd like to request his immediate transfer from Paris."

FOUR empty days followed, days filled with fretting and prying at headquarters. From Dijon came another intercepted message, taken from the corset stays of a male operative in petticoats en route to Lyons, a destination shown by his railway ticket. This message repeated the mystic formula:

"*Vernichten Weg.* 3 Lyons 18".

From Lyons, where the French Deuxième Bureau had concentrated some of its best agents, came word that there were no developments there. Hotels, streets, amusement places, cafés, outlying villages—all had been combed without yielding a single suspect. The French were certain that if Lyons were the Mecca of a mysterious German spy migration, the advance guards were yet to arrive.

The staff continued its research and speculation. An air service expert advanced the theory that the Germans were planing an overhead offensive far behind the French lines, with Lyons the first point to be destroyed by massed air squadrons.

This theory was punctured by a general staff expert who pointed out that the German air service need not take the whole German spy service into its confidence preliminary to such a coup. Furthermore, said an artilleryman, the wild claims of air service optimists that they were able to destroy cities had been fully neutralized by German failure to make even a sizable dent in Paris or London with massed air fleets and Zeppelins.

Reports were received and confirmed of the strange night maneuvering of Austrian reserves behind the Italian front. These alarms came chiefly from Italian headquarters, and were accompanied by ardent requests that the Allied generalissimo hold large forces ready for transfer through the Mont Cenis tunnel in event of a great Teuton offensive. Accordingly, French, English and American divisions were designated for transfer to Italy in case of emergency. In

the meantime, plans went ahead for pushing to the utmost the general Allied attacks, designed to push Hindenburg out of Northern France and Belgium.

Colonel Rand's impatience grew to a fever through these four days. Something big was afoot, therefore something tangible should be done to unmask the threat, he argued hotly. The colonel had evolved a theory of his own as to the purport of *"Vernichten Weg"*. It meant that the German supreme command planned to "destroy the way" of a threatened German revolt by winning a spectacular victory of some kind. Elton declined to debate the colonel's theory.

"It may mean just that, sir," he agreed. "But the fact remains that we've got to know its exact meaning, information that must be secured from German sources and not from deduction."

"Do you expect them to write you a letter and tell you what they're up to?" Rand demanded. "Suppose, in their desperation, they plan to make a sudden dash through Switzerland and envelop the Allied right flank! Where would we be, if they broke through, without any preparation to meet them? What chance would there be of a revolt in Germany then? And I'm telling you, Elton, they'd no more hesitate to rush through Switzerland than they did Belgium. Less so. They're desperate now."

"I heartily agree with the Colonel's theory," said Elton. "But my worry still centers on Lyons. Just what brings that peaceful city into the picture—and Von Strindheim? That's the riddle I want to solve."

"Then why not go to Lyons and solve it!" Rand demanded.

"Let me remind the Colonel that Lyons is filled with Allied agents who report nothing. Proof enough that Von Strindheim has his plans mighty thoroughly covered up."

"Well," Rand yielded grudgingly, "let's set a time limit on this waiting game. Make it as short as possible."

"If, in another three days, we are still in the dark," Elton agreed, "I'll push off with Sergeant Walters and Pram to see what I can see."

CHAPTER II

NEUTRAL PASSPORTS

FURTHER developments occurred, however, late in the afternoon of that same day, and from a wholly unexpected quarter. Out of the clear September sky came two strange birds of passage aboard an Austrian observation plane. The ship's engines, with their peculiar Teuton whir, set up the din of an alert. Anti-aircraft crews rushed to their guns, villagers took to their bomb proof basements and a summons went to Colombes les Belles for an American pursuit squadron. The anti-aircraft guns were barking their grim defiance before the gunners saw a trailing white streamer that proclaimed the airplane's peaceful intent. The gunners held their fire thereafter and watched the ship circle to a cautious landing at Hanlon field.

A rotund little Teuton in civilian clothes emerged from the plane with a tall, rawboned, Austrian army pilot. The two raised their hands in surrender and requested in good English that they be escorted at once, on a matter of urgent importance, to the American generalissimo. All efforts at interrogation failing at the landing field, the two men were taken to the casern and delivered to the counter-espionage chieftain.

"I am Herr Ernest Gruber," the Teuton introduced himself to Rand. "I come from Vienna with valuable information. My pilot, Lieutenant Ovart, will verify what it is I have to inform. You are the representative of the American general?"

"I am the representative of the American general," replied Rand. "But before we proceed, there is one of my staff I wish to have present."

The German visitor nodded a solemn assent. The two sat looking at each

other in silence until Elton reached the counter-espionage room from his own quarters.

"You may proceed with your business, Herr Gruber," said Rand, without the formality of presenting Elton.

"My words," Herr Gruber inquired anxiously, "they will to the American supreme commander be repeated?"

"In detail," said Rand, "if they are of sufficient importance to deserve his attention."

Herr Gruber threw off his reserve and unbosomed himself. The deliberation with which he began speaking shortly gave place to a quick, impassioned staccato. He had appeared a rotund, phlegmatic little Teuton of the non-military class. But, as he spoke, his dull brown eyes flashed with vitality and every feature and muscle of his fat red face responded to his animation.

"You think I am a German and therefore perhaps a traitor, sir," he said. "It is that I am born of Germany, but also I am an Internationalist who disputes the right of any nation to draw human blood. The war I opposed at Berlin until in prison I was placed by command of his Majesty. Never have we Sparticists condoned this mad slaughter. You are a militarist, Colonel, who lives by war and hopes of war and so no sympathy will have with my thoughts. I come here only because I can use you for my own ends, though I have no greater sympathy for you than for our own militarists."

"You are very frank." Rand scowled when Herr Gruber paused to moisten his lips. He added a bit acridly, "I trust you have come with something more important than a lecture on the wickedness of war. You Germans started this war; we are merely trying to stop it."

"Ach, Gott!" moaned Herr Gruber. "It is the very thing our German militarists say to us. Ah, they point to the wolves of England and the barbarians of America clutching at the throat of the Fatherland. But it is, we can never agree, Colonel; except that we Sparticists will this war end before all mankind is drained of its red blood and civilization reeks in frightful ruins."

"Come to your point, Herr Gruber," Rand goaded. "I have too many military duties to waste my good time in academic discussion of your pacifism. What brings you to Chaumont?"

"A warning, Colonel. A terrible warning! Let me it explain if you will patience have. Even as the masses of Russia have their own government saved, so will the people of Germany rise against the militarists. In Holland, in Denmark, in Sweden, and also in Switzerland, our Sparticists are planning. Our loyal agents are massed in Berlin and Vienna against *der Tag*. Yes, Colonel, *der Tag* of Germany's deliverance from the red butchers of war. The people are ready to rise. *Ach, Herr Gott,* but the militarists learned all it is we plan to do. They are hunting us down, though few it is they are able to find. So they are desperate, Colonel. They are desperate! One thing alone it can save them—a great victory!

"If they do not have the victory, they can not hold out against us through the Winter. With a great victory, the masses will cling to another last hope. Those terrible fires of nationalism, this murderous thing of patriotism, will come to the rescue of the butchers. So it is the generals plan a great victory. An empty victory will it be, Colonel, but a dangerous one. For there is but one place for a victory, and of it nothing will come!"

"A dash through Switzerland!" exclaimed Rand, half rising under the stress of his own swift deduction.

Herr Gruber shook his head and leaned forward.

"Against Italy!" he exclaimed. "It is that they will leap suddenly upon the Italian front, using every soldier they can spare. Already it is that they are drawing in their *Landsturm* and *Landwehr* divisions to fill among their veteran corps of the Austrian and Prussian arms. They will strike quick, before an-

other month has passed. Then will they a great victory claim; which means that through the Winter they will draw upon the old men and children of the Empire for fresh divisions, while they take the last food from the mouths of women and children in their hideous gamble for a great victory against France in next Spring!"

THEREAFTER, for the better part of an hour, Colonel Rand pressed his strange visitor for details. Rand was sharply suspicious at first of German trickery. Herr Gruber was able to supply no military details. He attributed to a Sparticist spy, an ex-officer who had wormed his way into a high Austrian staff conference, the information of an impending Austrian offensive against Italy. When Rand had exhausted his own resources at cross examination, he brought in high ranking chiefs of other sections.

The examination went on into the night. Herr Gruber's whole past life was interrogated. Experts studied his responses to trick questions, designed to disclose the real inner workings of the fellow's mind. His story, as well as his reactions to questions, proved convincing. He had fled Vienna at learning, through secret Sparticist sources, that he was to be arrested and tried for sedition. His pilot was a Socialist, forced into the military service by conscription, one whose sympathies had led to indiscretions. He, too, had been warned of impending arrest on charges of treason.

Out of seven hours of uninterrupted examination, the staff experts finally accepted several important conclusions:

That Herr Gruber was what he claimed to be, and sincere in his statements. That the spirit of revolt in the Central Empire was spreading, under Sparticist and Socialist leadership.

That the Prussian high commanders were in a hole at home, where they could continue at war only by dint of an impressive victory with which to feed the ebbing flames of German nationalism. That the Italian front was the probable point of attack, due to the desirability of forcing the Austrian army into active fighting; and because Italy alone offered hope of even a limited German success after the reverses in northern France and Belgium. And that immediate steps must be taken, through the Allied supreme commander, to hold heavy reserves ready for transfer through the Mont Cenis pass, by rail; and that air patrols, spies and trained observers must center their attention upon the Austro-Italian front.

Throughout the examination and later military conference, Elton remained a silent observer. The tactical discussions, centering about the movement of great masses of men, discussions in which army corps, even nations, were chess on a great board, were not his province, except as they related to his particular fragment of such operations. The particular phase of the subject that claimed his attention, the spy at Lyons, was passed over by the tactical staff without comment or question.

When the others, satisfied with the fruits of Herr Gruber's providential visitation, had gone to communicate the whole affair to the French mission, Elton remained for a few words with Colonel Rand.

"I'm convinced, sir," he said, "there's something important in connection with the Prussian plans that Herr Gruber knows nothing about."

"Wasn't that a lucky break!" Rand effused, rubbing his hand in delight. "Well, when rascals fall out decent people come into their own. What was that you were just saying, Elton?"

"I'm convinced, sir, there's some mighty vital information in connection with the Prussian war plan that Herr Gruber knows nothing of."

"Possibly," Rand replied laconically. "But now that we know definitely what the German army is up to, details are less important. We can make ready for their attack, rob them of their surprise,

if they strike. All the French need do is hold enough rolling stock in hand, and we can shift an army by rail in twenty-four hours to stiffen the whole Italian front. Secrecy was the Germans' only hope—and we've robbed them of that. Of course, it's our job to follow out this spy mess, though it sinks to minor importance, Elton, after what we learned today."

"On the other hand, sir, I'm inclined to think it is more important than ever," Elton said somberly. "I can't escape the feeling that there's some sinister connection between Lyons and this Italian blow."

"Yes? But what reason have you?" asked the colonel.

"The fact that Baron von Strindheim is on the job, sir. They'd not pull him out of Paris at such a critical time for some petty mischief."

Rand stroked his nose briefly as he reflected.

"Well, Elton, I can't agree with you," he decided. "But one thing is certain, we've got that Lyons mess to look into without any delay. What do you propose now?"

"I'm ready to shove off immediately, sir. I can go now with the feeling that I'm on a live trail."

"To Lyons, eh. Direct?"

"No, sir. I'm planning to go to Switzerland."

Colonel Rand started. His long lean face registered irritation.

"Herr Gruber told us what is in the air," he reminded stoutly. "You talk one minute of important details at Lyons —then announce that you go to Switzerland. Explain!"

"Very simple, sir. The details I want are available in Switzerland, not at Lyons. I'll pay my respects to Lyons later, when I know what I'm doing. And the way I have things figured, I'll have to move fast and have a lot of help from you. Don't think this is a mere impulse, Colonel Rand. I've had the whole plan plotted. Herr Gruber's visit merely vitalized it."

"Elton, I'm acting against my best judgment," Rand rejoined severely. "Now tell me what it is you expect me to do."

Except for a momentary sparkle in his blue eyes, Elton's placid expression was unchanged as he listed his requirements.

"First, I want two sets of passports prepared for Walters and Pram. Then I want Pram released unconditionally to Sergeant Walters, who will give him his instructions. The two of them are to follow me to Berne by twenty-four hours, in cits, well provided with funds for their living expenses. I'll give Walters his instructions before I leave."

Rand's face clouded again at mention of Pram.

"Can't you get along somehow without that fellow, Elton?"

But Elton was firm.

"Impossible, sir. It is now Wednesday. By Saturday you should receive a message in code from me, wired from Berne. I will use the code word "delayed". Whenever you receive that message, I want a French staff car sent to Basle and parked early the next morning at the international boundary. An American staff car will wait for me two miles from the frontier, in France, at the point marked X on this terrain map. That covers all my needs. I've reduced it all to a memorandum for the Colonel's convenience."

"Now watch out, Elton," Rand cautioned fretfully, "and don't get us tangled up with the Swiss. While the general overlooked the complaints of our legation at Berne when you went over there after Von Kulm, remember that there's still such a thing as neutrality laws."

"Our passports, sir," said Elton, "will show that we are neutral travelers. I'll not go near the American legation this time; and if we're clumsy enough to get into trouble with the Swiss—well, we'll take our medicine without involving American headquarters in the mess. Good night, sir." He saluted.

CHAPTER III

AN AUSTRIAN WITH A PRICE

BEFORE leaving the casern, Elton went to the headquarters commandant and arranged personally for the release of Pram to Sergeant Walters. Pram was brought from the guardhouse for interview—a robust, well knit young man with the half sullen, half defiant expression of a man who lives in a world of hopeless injustice. His gray eyes, staring straight ahead, seemed to say that he had withdrawn wholly within himself and refused to interest himself in whatever whim had brought him from Paris to Chaumont. But at seeing Elton his face quickened into friendly recognition.

"Well, Pram, you've been getting into lots of trouble lately," Elton greeted him.

"But I was in it before I knew what it meant, Cap'n!" Pram protested doggedly. "Anyhow, I can look the Cap'n straight in the eye and say I ain't broke my word to you yet. Maybe I'd be better off if I had."

"Of course you haven't broken your word, and you're not going to," Elton replied warmly. "That's the reason I had you brought up here—to help me on an important job. Will you promise to take orders from Sergeant Walters, one of my men, who will call here for you?"

"Anything the Cap'n says goes with me," Pram asserted without hesitation.

"All right; then I'll count on you, Pram. You'll be going over into Switzerland very shortly. Do exactly as Sergeant Walters instructs you. Sorry I haven't time to talk over details with you now, but Walters will tell you everything you need to know."

Elton shook Pram's hand heartily and and turned to go. He was well satisfied with the man he had left behind him. A sullen prisoner, burning with bitterness against the world, had emerged from the guardhouse. Another man, alert, radiant with hope and walking with a light step, had been returned to confinement to wait for Sergeant Walters.

Since, by the time he was ready to start on his venture, there was insufficient time to reach Paris for the morning express to Geneva, Elton left by automobile, his destination Bellegarde. He went by way of Belfort, which gave him an opportunity to pass south along the frontier and study the lay of the land in front of Basle, where zealous French and Swiss detachments stood guard over the international boundary. Thence a leisurely afternoon spin landed him at Bellegarde at dusk, his arrival nicely timed to that of the express from Paris.

Dismissing the headquarters chauffeur with orders to return via the long route through Paris, he joined the score of travelers who were leaving the train at Bellegarde for the shuttle train that would carry them to Annemasse on the international boundary, just outside Geneva. Elton wore civilian clothes, but employed no other disguise save a slight change of posture intended to efface his military erectness and gait.

The shuttle train rattled on to Annemasse, no one appearing to notice the passenger who had boarded at Bellegarde. Elton's passports, recording him a South American investigator interested in Swiss butterfats, were passed promptly by Swiss and French officials at the international barrier. An electric car landed him at Geneva a few minutes later.

Notwithstanding a recent vigorous cleanup of Teuton secret agents at Geneva, Elton suspected that he was being followed as he left Annemasse. By the time he had reached the Kursaal in Geneva for dinner, he was certain of it. His shadow took a table near him, left the Kursaal after dinner close at his heels, and trailed him by horsecab across the river, past the kiosque and Promenade du Lac to Quai des Eaux Vives, where Elton boarded a lake steamer for Lausanne. His shadow was aboard the

craft a few minutes later.

Of this development Elton felt no concern. The shadow was a thin, wiry, alert type of operative and above the average intelligence of German leg-operatives. But Elton had expected to fall under observation when he crossed into Switzerland at such a time as this, and gave little thought to the secret agent. In any event he would be safe enough on neutral soil, while the German secret service first tried to find out his mission, and then attempted to trick him with misinformation. Not until his real identity became known, or the higher agents saw in him a menace to their plans, would he stand in danger. Far ahead of such a possibility, Elton planned to be safely back on French soil.

On stepping from the train at Berne into the Bubenberg-Platz, he took a motorcab to the Bellevue Palace, luxurious rendezvous of ambassadors, ministers, wealthy intriguers, high secret officials and world adventurers. Here he engaged an expensive suite for two weeks. Of this arrangement he made a complicated and convincing transaction. Since he carried no baggage except a small handbag, he complained that his important effects were in France, including most of his money.

In engaging the suite for two weeks, he paid for but one week, on account of what he had termed his tempoary embarrassment. That the German secret service would know of this transaction immediately he held no doubt. Likewise, he reasoned, they would conclude that his stay in Berne was to extend over at least one full week, longer if he did not get whatever information he came for within that period.

After settling himself at the Bellevue Palace, Elton plunged at once into the purpose for which he had come. He had allotted exactly three days as the maximum for his stay in Switzerland. Von Strindheim, the man whose trail he stalked, was entrenched somewhere in Lyons. The enigma of Von Strindheim's projected mischief was to be unmasked only in Switzerland. There were two places from which this vital information might be obtained—from the French legation attachés, in case they had developed a Teuton traitor; otherwise, from the German diplomatic service in Switzerland, under the wing of whose protection the German secret service functioned.

HIS previous operations in Switzerland simplified his contact with the French. Captain Lareaux, of the French military attachés, would accept him immediately, following their past operations together in the Von Kulm case. Accordingly, he drove directly to the home of Captain Lareaux.

The French officer received him with warm politeness, followed immediately by ill concealed alarm.

"Monsieur, I am enchanted to have the honor of your presence at my poor billet!" exclaimed Lareaux. "Enter please."

Elton stepped inside. He had observed en route that he was followed and he now saw the strained anxiety his presence caused the Frenchman.

"I'm really sorry to bother you, monsieur," Elton apologized. "Since I come on a strict official errand, do not hesitate to say so if my presence at your home embarrasses you. I am certain I was followed here and will leave promptly if you wish."

Lareaux gave a startled glance at the door, then shrugged indifference and bowed Elton to a seat.

"The damage, it is done," he rejoined, adding with characteristic French politeness, "but what does it matter, if I am to have the pleasure of your presence?"

Elton sat down, accepted a cigar, declined a glass of wine and inquired of the captain's health.

"I take it you know what brings me to Berne," he announced. "Since our legation has learned things, doubtless

your own diplomatic service is informed."

"I understand," Lareaux assented. "Please do not think of me that I complain. But it's most unhappy, Monsieur Elton, that you come to Berne when the least circumstances may arouse undue suspicion. I do not blame you, but higher service should arrange a better liaison."

"I came of my own accord, Captain Lareaux. We are thoroughly informed of the German design against Italy, but there is one small detail of it they have kept in mystery. I have my own reasons for thinking there is some sinister importance attached to their pilgrimage of spies through Berne and Zurich."

"But yes, monsieur," Lareaux rejoined quickly. "Their design is screened in the deepest mystery—though this very night I am to know the truth. It is for that reason I regret your presence at Berne!"

"Have you learned the truth of their designs at Lyons?"

"Our experts at Paris have broken their cipher, Captain Elton," said Lareaux. "Or, more properly, I should say they have approved the deciphering done by an American officer. For many days we have been searching to find what lies behind the German messages. There are many theories, Captain. We know full well the desperation under which the German great staff labors. We have information of their design against Italy. From that we have made a deduction that their phrase *'Vernichten Weg'* means an operation to destroy the foundation of Sparticist designs in the Central Empire and prevent a revolution of the working classes."

"But what of the words 'Lyons 18', monsieur?"

Lareaux shrugged.

"There are many theories up to this moment, monsieur. For my own part, I believe Lyons must be a code word for some other point in France. Perhaps Paris. One of our officers thought it might mean a design against the great Mont Cenis tunnel, to shut allied reserves out of Italy at the critical hour of attack. But that, of course, would be impossible."

Elton started at Lareaux' disclosure.

"The Mont Cenis tunnel, Captain Lareaux?" he inquired eagerly. "If that were destroyed, the Italians could not be supported from France?"

Lareaux nodded.

"Indeed, monsieur. But the tunnel is carefully guarded day and night by a heavy force of fine soldiers where it passes into the Alps from France. The Italians are vigilant with detachments of their best troops where the tunnel emerges into Italy. It would be impossible for the Germans to fight their way into the tunnel even if they sent a battalion of spies!"

"Captain Lareaux," Elton asked sharply, "you are familiar with the desperate resourcefulness of Von Strindheim, who twice has escaped the French guillotine when you had him securely under arrest!"

"Mon dieu, monsieur! Who in France has not heard his hideous name? But beyond petty mischief there is no great damage the little baron can perpetrate. Nor are we worried by the German secret service at the present hour. Germany must have a great military victory, one to bolster up her Junker politicians and discredit her radicals. If not, she will fail before Winter sets in, monsieur. Where else is she to find even a hollow show of success, unless against the Italians, whose disaffection is almost as rank as that in the Austrian regiments!"

"I agree with that intent," Elton replied. "But my own interest is centered upon Lyons, Captain. I hold Von Strindheim in larger opinion than you do; and until I find out what has dragged him into this affair I'm not going to be satisfied. That's what brought me to Switzerland, and I'm going to get what I came here after, even if I have to get it personally from the German ministry!"

THE effect of this last threat puzzled Elton. He had expected Lareaux to fly into hot protest against the hint of violence involving such a violation of Swiss neutrality. Lareaux fixed him with a sly smile and shrugged enigmatically.

"You may spare yourself any such risk, Monsieur Elton," he said quietly. "This very night I shall know all. It was for that reason I felt you should not come. But since you are here, I will not refer again to that. Tonight, there will be brought to me a copy of the Prussian plan."

"One of your own agents has worked his way inside?"

"But no, monsieur. An Austrian traitor, of high rank, who sees so clearly the dismal end, is making provision for his future. He is claiming a pretty price for his infamy, but there is no price too great for Prussian secrets at this moment when the scales of victory are so very lightly balanced."

"You have every reason to know it is not a trick they are playing you, Captain Lareaux?"

"The Austrian's negotiations are bona fide, Monsieur Elton. We know from many sources his extremity. From our own agents we know he is held in distrust by the Germans, who suspect him of a leaning toward the Austrian Sparticists. At this moment he is in Berne, in deep disguise and guarded by his trusted Austrian henchmen. At midnight the Herr Oberst Rombolz will come here, as will three of our highest officers, to receive him. We will examine his documents, pay to him a part of the sum agreed upon and assist him to escape through France to Brest where he will board a neutral ship bound for South America. Voilà!"

Elton reflected briefly upon the obvious flaw in the story of the Austrian.

"But if your man is distrusted by the German staff," he inquired, "how do you expect him to have access to their carefully guarded secrets? Even if your Austrian is sincere, might not the information he brings be a trick? It would not be the first time the Germans had used a traitor to their own good ends."

"Excellent, monsieur!" exclaimed Lareaux, clapping his hands together delightedly. "Your suspicion is most logical. But—it is that Rombolz has his own way of learning. I will explain in the deepest confidence. From the Austrian consulate at Zurich has he obtained the information. It is chiefly from Zurich, Captain Elton, that the Germans are operating upon this mischief. Our own agents have seen no less than a dozen of their men debark by motorboat at night into the Zurichsee."

"Officially," Elton pointed out, "the Austrians are loyal to the German command. The Germans might easily perpetrate a slick ruse on you through their trusted agent at Zurich."

Captain Lareaux moved his chair close to Elton. He was thoroughly enjoying Elton's misgivings as the plan unfolded.

"But it is, my friend," he confided, "that the Herr Oberst went to Zurich in disguise to talk with the Austrian consul—Herr Rombolz, who is the brother of the Herr Oberst. And the brothers Rombolz, they shall share together the fruits of their treason!"

Elton brightened, suspicion giving place to hope at the Frenchman's final disclosure.

"That places the whole matter in a different light, monsieur," he agreed. "I did not for a moment doubt your own discretion, nor the judgment and prudence of your service in Switzerland. In fact, I came to Berne with the hope that, with the Central Empire pounding on the rocks, some mercenary rat would pawn the imperial secrets. I will be permitted to see the Herr Oberst's report?"

Lareaux knotted his brows over this proposal. It was some moments before he replied.

"But yes, monsieur," he decided. "Of

your discretion we have had much evidence. But the report, it must go to Annemasse only by a guarded messenger of our legation, and from Annemasse it shall be carried through the air to Paris by our fastest plane. The arrangements, we have made them already. No word must be sent by the telegraph, since the German secret service has its ears at every wire in Switzerland!"

"Thank you for your great courtesy, monsieur," Elton said warmly. "You may depend fully upon my discretion—and that I will leave Switzerland the instant I have the information I came for."

"*Bien, monsieur!* Then you shall be on your way to Geneva in the morning. At midnight we shall have the information. It is my invitation that you remain my guest to receive the Herr Oberst. It is much more discreet that you remain here until morning than that we meet again in Berne tomorrow."

CHAPTER IV

TEUTON ORDERS

LAREAUX was in high spirits as the evening wore on. He made no further reference to the enigma of "*Vernichten Weg.* 3 Lyons 18". His mind was filled with the larger thought that at last the war neared an end, France victorious.

Impending victory was reflected everywhere. Diplomats of neutral countries no longer deferred to the German ministers. Even the Swiss general staff had abandoned its heel-clicking courtesies to high Teuton officers at the Bellevue Palace and other public places. The Spanish legation had given a brilliant dinner a few nights before, at which the German ministry was all but ignored. German securities were at a low ebb, and falling lower daily. French, British and American securities were enjoying a corresponding rise.

"*Mon dieu, Monsieur Elton!*" Lareaux exclaimed. "For years our vain Boches have passed at their own great estimate. Their high officials in Switzerland have been received as supermen, the potential rulers of the universe. They have strutted, and snubbed whom they pleased; and every consulate has fawned at their feet to intrigue for their favor—but in a few months more there will not be room for them at the best hotels!"

At the approach of midnight the Frenchman grew less voluble and was assailed by restlessness. He passed from one room to another and took frequent glasses of cognac. Shortly after eleven-thirty, three French officers reported, one a colonel, attaché of the French legation; the other two, civilians of the French secret service. The four exchanged pleasantries and small chatter, and drank cognac, without referring to the impending visit.

Promptly at midnight, the Herr Oberst Rombolz appeared. He came from a rear passageway of the Lareaux billet, one that connected by a devious underground route with an obscure Swiss *pension* on an adjoining street. With him was a Frenchman, trusted retainer of Lareaux, who had brought him blindfolded. The guide promptly faded from the room, while Lareaux removed the covering from the Austrian's face and bowed stiffly to his visitor.

No time was wasted in preliminary. On the faces of the four French officers was clearly written their disgust at the presence of a traitor, even one who favored their own cause. All remained standing, in attitudes of grave formality, since Lareaux made no proffer of a seat to the Austrian.

The Herr Oberst bobbed his closely cropped, square head at each of his five hosts in turn and, without speaking, drew from an inner pocket of his undress cavalry tunic an envelop which he delivered to Lareaux. Lareaux read it in silence and passed it on to his seniors.

Elton centered his interest upon the Austrian. Colonel Rombolz was a typical commander of Austrian cavalry, a military man from head to toe. He was

of medium stature, with thick, stiff torso and thin, tapering, bowed legs. His face, red from wine and wind, set off with flaring mustache, was as square and emotionless as a study in bronze; and he stood with folded arms in the pose of a commander at review while awaiting the response of the four Frenchmen. They made a prompt decision.

"Herr Oberst, our business together is ended," Lareaux shortly addressed the Austrian. "The official memorandum you have brought us fortunately agrees with information we already possess. We are ready to carry out our part of the agreement with you."

Rombolz inclined his head slightly, without change of expression.

"Please to believe, messieurs," he said in poor French, "that I am moved to this act not by greed but in the interest of my troubled countrymen who so long have been crying for peace for Austria."

"Your reasons are for your own conscience, Herr Oberst," said Lareaux stiffly. He passed a bulging envelop to the Austrian. "You will find here fifty bills of the denomination of a thousand francs each. The balance due will be delivered to you by our agent at Buenos Aires. We are ready to give you safe escort to the port of Brest immediately."

The Herr Oberst accepted the price of his treason unflinchingly and stowed it in his tunic.

"Until my brother, Herr Rudolf Rombolz, is here from Zurich, messieurs," he replied, "I shall wait in Berne. There are friends who will provide safe shelter." He leaned forward again, the vaguest show of a bow, and said bluntly, "*Guten Abend, meine Herren.*"

WHEN the Austrian, blindfolded, had been escorted back whence he came, the four Frenchmen waxed enthusiastic as they scanned the secret document. All spoke at once.

"Is it not as I predicted!" exclaimed the colonel. "The Germans will throw their last frenzied strength against Italy. The document, it is perfect!"

"As I thought," cried Lareaux. "Lyons is but a code word for Paris. Ah, but now they shall pay a sweet penalty for their mischief!"

The colonel read from the traitor's document of the Austrian consulate at Zurich:

> "All troops released from the Bulgarian front shall move into position for the offensive, which hereafter shall be known by the code words '*Vernichten Weg*'. Fifteen Prussian and Bavarian divisions shall be designated to assist the Austrian army in the main blow. The attack will open as soon after December 1st as becomes practicable. This will allow for shortening of our lines north of Verdun, and the institution of a defensive resistance by the armies of the North. All secret police, military police, and *Landwehr* regiments where needed, will exert their utmost efforts to suppress anti-government activities among Sparticist and Socialist groups, until attack is under way. Immediately preceding attack, all divisions will be informed that the future of the Fatherland depends upon our success in making a decisive blow against the Italian army. Every precaution will be taken to preserve secrecy. Intelligence agents will cause false reports of our intentions to fall into the hands of the enemy. Destruction of munition plants and other important centers at Paris (code word Lyons) has been successfully organized under direction Agent No. 3."

"One or two questions, monsieur," Elton addressed Lareaux, when the whole of the stolen plans had been read over, dissected in detail and accepted. "Do you know for certain that the Herr Oberst is the brother of the consul at Zurich."

"It is most certain, Monsieur Elton," said Lareaux. "Did we have no record, they are alike enough in appearance, even to the walrus mustache."

"Have you been able to follow the trail of the German agents out of Berne and Zurich?"

"But yes, Monsieur Elton," Lareaux replied quickly. He crossed the room and leaned close to Elton's ear. "Even in my own billet, among dear friends, I speak of this only in a whisper. Three of our best shadows they have joined

with the German spies, through the Austrian legation of Berne."

"You are certain they made contact without arousing suspicion?"

"Perfect, monsieur. With the German message we provided them—a copy, as precise as a photostat, of a message our Deuxième Bureau intercepted at the frontier. At any hour we should have report from our men of their whereabouts after crossing the Lake of Geneva."

"You sent them very recently, monsieur?"

"Ah, it is the ten days gone by, my Captain. But perhaps it is they lie close to cover and have much to learn."

"Perhaps," said Elton, thoughtfully. He took up the Austrian's document, read it through for the third time, then announced his departure. "I am very grateful to you, Captain Lareaux, for your hospitality and the excellent information you have permitted me to have," he said. "While circumstance forces me to miss the morning train out of Berne, you may be sure I will leave Switzerland at once. *Adieu, messieurs.*"

The facility with which he found transportation on leaving the Lareaux billet, far out on the Bundesgasse, gave Elton the suspicion that his cab was provided by the German secret service. To all appearances, the cab chanced to be passing in the direction he must go to reach the Bellevue Palace on the Inselgasse. A guarded survey of his rear convinced him that he was not being followed, confirmation of the fact that his driver was the shadow.

On reaching the hotel, he asked the cabman to wait for him while he prepared a telegram which he must take to the Bubenberg-Platz office for immediate dispatch. In his room he wrote a brief message in cipher. It was addressed to a purported wholesale dealer in butterfats at Paris, whence it would be relayed promptly by an American agent to Colonel Rand at headquarters. The message, deciphered, read:

FRENCH HAVE COMPLETE INFORMATION. UNNECESSARY FOR ME TO REMAIN HERE. WILL RETURN PROMPTLY. REGARDS—ELTON

The patient cabman was nodding in his seat when Elton returned to the conveyance. The fellow seemed to awaken with a start, shake himself and rub his eyes, gestures that gave to Elton confirmation of the fellow's real occupation, since his face bore no evidence of fatigue, nor his eyes of sleepiness. They drove to the station, where Elton checked the message over carefully and placed it on the wire, liberally tipping the station operator and admonishing that the greatest of care be exercised in sending the cryptic letters precisely as they were set down. This done, he returned to the cab, drove back to the Bellevue Palace and abstractly dismissed the cabman with a tip of ten francs.

"*Merci bien, monsieur!*" the fellow exclaimed in excellent French.

Elton nodded absentmindedly and entered the hotel. The cabman again had overplayed his hand by his farewell in French. His face was distinctly Teuton and Elton had addressed him only in German, the usual language of Berne. The final touch, by which the German agent had sought to disarm suspicion, removed any lingering doubts in Elton's mind.

The German secret service would lose no time in intercepting the message he had sent, either by tapping the wires or bribing the operator. Elton purposely had used a recently discarded French cipher, one that had been broken by Wilhelmstrasse.

Therefore, the Germans shortly would have his message to Rand in clear English. They would read that the Americans had accepted the French estimate of the situation. But what they would not know was the code meaning of the final word "regards". That single word of greeting would convey to Rand the code warning:

"Disregard this message".

AS HE tossed through the night, analyzing events at the French attaché's billet, Elton did not lightly put aside French credence in the Austrian betrayal. Nor could he escape the skepticism that had caused him to send the cryptogram to Colonel Rand. The Herr Oberst's story had been convincing in many ways. It had fitted in nicely with the vague information heretofore intercepted by French and Americans. The Austrian's version of a Prussian secret service plot in which Lyons was a mere code word for Paris lent strong plausibility to the document he sold the French.

But Elton credited the German secret service with knowing that their messages had been intercepted. He argued that, this being so, the German intelligence staff faced the necessity of a successful subterfuge in order to cover up their real design, else they must abandon it altogether.

Also there was the enigma of the Herr Oberst. Rombolz was a militarist, his face strongly lined, ruthless, unimaginative. In past dealings with spy mercenaries and traitors, Elton had been able to read clearly in voice and eyes the measure of their infamy. The Herr Oberst was not such a man, unless Austrian dissatisfaction with Prussian command, now at the danger point even in Vienna, had turned his head.

There was the equal possibility that the German staff had selected an Austrian for their purpose, simply for the effect on French credence. If so, they had selected one in whom they could trust implicitly. If that were the case, then the report they had Rombolz carry to the French was a daring fabrication of truth, half-truth and deception. It confirmed the projected attack on Italy, fixed the date far in the distance and explained away the mischief at Lyons. Analysis confirmed Elton's first skepticism.

He rose early in the morning with his decision made. A few hours in Berne would solve the enigma of the Herr Colonel.

At nine o'clock he took a cab, changed vehicles several times, and brought up finally at the Ruof, an obscure hotel on the Aarbergergasse. Sight of his faithful assistant, the veteran Sergeant Walters, seated in the office, brought him no surprise. Walters was due at the Ruof this morning, and Elton knew in advance that the sergeant would be on hand regardless of difficulties. Without glancing at Walters, Elton walked up the stairs to the first floor and was joined immediately by his assistant.

"Got a room right down here three doors, sir," Walters reported, leading the way.

"Any complications en route?" Elton inquired. "How about Pram?"

"We come right across at Annemasse, sir," Walters reported. "The Boche agents got on my trail at the border. Followed me right into Berne—but I gave my man the slip before I come here. Walked his legs off, sir, then jumped a motor cab. Best thing he could get was a horse cab. Changed three times before I got here. Been watching the last hour, but haven't seen nobody suspicious. About Pram—he's put up at the Bahnhof."

"Fine work, Walters. Now tell me what you make of Pram?"

Walters thought for several moments and gave a wry grimace.

"A strange mixture, Cap'n. He's still riled over the way he was treated—twenty years for cussing out a lieutenant. I tried to explain the Army game to him, but he just couldn't get it through his head. Said he should have beat up that lieutenant. But just the same, he seems to be a pretty good sort at heart—and I'll gamble on it he's grateful to the cap'n for getting him loose from Paris."

"You explained that I had vouched for him, pledged my word he'd make good?"

"Yes'r. I put that to him strong. He said he'd make good to you if it was his last act. My judgment is he'll stick—but it's a big temptation for him over

here, sir. All he has to do is slip away, and there's nothing we can do about it."

Elton studied the wall, a reflective smile on his lips.

"Well, it's a chance, I suppose," he decided. "But human nature is a strange thing, isn't it? Pram's a reformed crook. I happen to know his past history. Fact is, I took a chance on him and turned him loose on his word to mend his ways when I was operating out of the Department of Justice several years ago. I happen to know he made good.

"He wrote me he'd enlisted for the war, but asked for no help when he got in a jam with one of these stiff-laced military courts. He had a lot of reason to feel justified in disappearing into Switzerland. His parents were Austrian, so why should he have any great enthusiasm over the war after the way he's been treated? But just because somebody showed faith in him—he vows he'll make good, no matter what it costs him. It doesn't sound quite logical, does it? Yet I'm gambling on Pram, Walters. I think I know his kind."

"Well, I've seen some queer ones myself, Cap'n," Walters rejoined. "I sure hope you don't get fooled on this one, sir."

"Now for the day's work," said Elton, turning briskly to business. "Our first move is an important one, and what we do thereafter depends on the outcome. You are to contact Pram at the Bahnhof and give him his instructions. It is important that you should not be shadowed from here, or identified in any way with Pram. I take it you have kept clear of him so far."

Walters nodded.

"Yes'r. Pram and I traveled to Berne in different coaches. I gave him his instructions and rehearsed everything before we left Chaumont. He left headquarters the color of a Spaniard, and he'll be a blond Austrian again when he comes down from his room. He's waiting for me in the beer garden and will signal me his room number. We got that all figured out, Cap'n."

Elton took from his pocketbook a small wax covered pellet and a fold of paper, which he handed to Walters, explaining:

"These are Pram's passports to the Austrian legation, Walters. When he reports there, the attaché will ask him four identification questions. I've written them down, with the answers. He must learn them word for word. I secured the formula from Lareaux of the French intelligence last night, who vouches for its accuracy. This pellet is German cipher, an exact duplicate of the ones we intercepted. Pram needs to keep his wits about him—"

"Sir, may I say one thing," Walters interrupted with a dubious shake of his head. "Pram is green as grass on military things. Hasn't even got a good military setup. Outside his Austrian looks and his ability to warble German like a native of the Fatherland, he's lost if they ask him any military questions."

"I understand that fully, Walters. But Pram can deliver this cipher order, answer the identification questions and refuse to say another word. Silence may pass for discretion. Even if he bungles the deal and they suspect him, they can't arrest him in neutral Switzerland. But if they accept him, it is necessary for me to know what happens. You shadow him to the vicinity of the legation and get contact with him after he reports. If he receives orders sending him to Geneva or Lyons, I must have that information before his train leaves Berne. Any questions?"

"Nos'r."

"One thing more, Walters. Be ready for a quick move tonight in one of two directions. If Pram makes a safe connection with the German secret service, we'll be shoving off from Berne right close behind him. If not—the three of us will board tonight's train for Zurich. I'll be waiting right here for your report."

CHAPTER V

THE AUSTRIAN CONSULATE

ELTON put in some time studying Swiss timetables and routes between Berne and Zurich and from Zurich to Basle. As for Geneva and the region surrounding the lake, he had no need to refresh his memory following his recent adventures with the ill starred Count von Kulm, now awaiting execution at Vincennes.

When he had plotted every possible future move he turned to a careful estimate of the now vital time element. There was nothing more than surmise behind his belief that the term "Lyons 18" in the German cryptograms fixed September 18th as the date of the mysterious German mischief. There was the possibility of another meaning. But the risk was too great for chance. And with September 18th three days off, he had left only two days in which to wrest from the German secret service its carefully hoarded secret. That would leave him a single day in which to get the warning back into France.

There was time only for quick, decisive action. If the Pram ruse succeeded, there was the possibility that his own agent might be able to lead him to the rendezvous in France. Certainly, Elton reasoned, if Pram should be accepted for a part in the German coup, he would be delivered at his destination in proper time. The trip to Zurich, his hole card, meant a swift and precarious detour.

Usually master of himself, Elton was stirred to restlessly pacing the floor as the afternoon wore on. Thus far in his career overseas he had met only success against the Prussian secret service. Not once had he failed to trap his man. Now he saw the specter of possible failure. If he tripped in Switzerland, he would be compelled to rush to Lyons, there to grope for the trail of the crafty Baron von Strindheim. That master craftsman could be counted upon to leave no visible trail. Therefore, without knowing the Prussian's mission, further than that it related in some mysterious fashion to a desperate design against the Italian front, Elton would have to depend upon a miracle of good fortune for success. And Elton had no faith in miracles.

The evening express for Lausanne, connecting with the Geneva ports, would leave Berne at six o'clock. At four Elton made ready for a quick departure from the Ruof. He had left his bag at the Bellevue Palace by design. In his pockets he carried his necessities; minor toilet articles, a block of fine sandpaper and three sets of extra passports which gave Spanish names to himself, Walters and Pram, and described them as purchasers of blooded stock, duly authorized to visit Berne, Geneva, Zurich and Basle.

When Walters had not reported at five o'clock, Elton was attacked by growing uneasiness. With time pressing hard on his heels, he knew that the slightest mischance spelled disaster. Walters and Pram were necessary to his move in either direction. Without them, he would be wasting his time, risking a desperate gamble in going to Zurich. He would be left merely groping, without tangible plan, in moving to Lyons, through Geneva. His confidence in Walters alone sustained him as he watched the precious minutes slip by. Unless Walters had been unexpectedly pounced upon from behind, he would find some way back, no matter what the difficulties.

Shortly after 5:15 the sergeant appeared suddenly, without rapping at the door. Elton read the triumph in the veteran noncom's face before he spoke. Pram had succeeded.

"He made the grade, sir," Walters whispered. "Pram's on his way now to the station. Train leaves at six for Geneva."

Elton's manner was unhurried as he motioned Walters to a chair, and sat down close beside him.

"Tell me in your own way, Walters, just what happened," Elton prompted.

"Wasn't much to it, sir. I made safe

connections with Pram at the Bahnhof Platz. We went to his room and I give him the lay of the land. I followed him to the Austrian legation, with nobody trailing. He went inside and that was the last I saw of him until twenty minutes ago. He took a tram coming my way, and I swung aboard. That gave us a chance to talk. He said they looked his papers over, had him wait until just now and then told him he was to take the six o'clock train to Geneva. He's to take a boat from there at nine o'clock tonight. They told him how to identify himself at the boat, a thirty-foot launch. That's all they told him, but they gave him his orders to deliver to the skipper."

Walters reached in his pocket and produced a small unsealed envelop.

"It was taking a risk of spoiling everything, Cap'n," said Walters, "but I figured you'd want to look it over. Here it is—but, somehow, I've got to get this back to Pram before his train pulls out. If we're going on the same train, I can make a good job of passing it back then."

ELTON seized the envelop and scanned its contents. It appeared to be nothing more than a doctor's prescription. The symbols were too few to carry a message either in cipher or code.

"Light a fire in that toy fireplace," he instructed Walters. "There's something in this document that we don't see. Stuff all the newspapers, even those railway guides, into your fire. We've got to have some fast heat!"

As soon as the flames in the diminutive Swiss hotel fireplace subsided into a hot glow, Elton applied the German prescription to the heat. Within the space of a minute the expected symbols appeared on the surface and there was unmasked an invisible cipher, done in lemon juice or some simple pigment invariably used for the convenience of lesser field operatives.

Elton, whose spirits had been rising since the arrival of Walters, gave an unwonted groan as he glanced at his watch. Exactly thirty minutes remained before Pram's train left Berne. But he saw that the cipher was identical with that which had conveyed the mysterious phrase, *"Vernichten Weg.* 3 Lyons 18". Also, it was equally terse.

He set to work instantly, wrote down the previously broken key arrangement of the alphabet and began an unraveling of the cryptogram. His worksheet read:

German alphabet: A B C D E F G H I J
Key arrangement: W X Z L Y O N S A B
K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
C D E F G H I J K M P Q R T U V
The message: YAF KZSWOMYJ OPJ LA-
KHGFAYJYF

With decisive deliberation he applied each letter of the message to the key arrangement and translated it into the letter set immediately above it in the alphabet. The result was the four words—

"Ein Schafter fur disponieren."

Elton instantly caught the purpose behind those quaint German words. Translated into English they said, "A spy for disposition". The Austrian legation had merely tricked Pram with his own death warrant to carry to his executioner on the lake. Elton knew suddenly why the French agents sent by Lareaux had been so readily accepted; why they had failed to return from their mission. The German secret service had foreseen the danger, and had taken steps to protect itself against Allied agents with forged cipher orders. He turned to Walters, instantly adapting his plans to the German maneuver.

"Pram did not succeed," he said with a quiet intensity. "You've got to catch that train, Walters, at all costs, or he'll be at the bottom of Lake Geneva before midnight. Now listen carefully. Both of you get off the train at the first stop, double back by motor cab to Bremgarten, wait there until time to catch the eleven o'clock train to Zurich, by way of Bieme. I'll meet you both at the Seefeld-Quai at eight in the evening. Every-

thing depends upon you for the time being, Walters—and you've got just seventeen minutes to get aboard that train. Move out, if you have no questions."

"Yes'r," affirmed Walters, and flashed through the door.

WHEN Elton emerged from the Ruof a few minutes later, he strolled along the Aarbergergasse for a hundred meters at an unhurried gait, saw no indication that he was being shadowed, and stepped into a motor cab. By the time he reached the station the train for Geneva was lost in the distance. He saw with relief that Walters was nowhere about the spacious station, which meant that he had made safe connections with Pram's train.

He had a leisurely dinner at the station café. Precisely as he had expected, his trail was picked up promptly by an alert Teuton operative. The fellow took a table across the room and, though trying hard to conceal his purpose, quickly confirmed Elton's suspicions by his exaggerated nonchalance and sly glances from behind a menu card.

When he had eaten, Elton made his way to the ticket bureau, with the many guarded glances of a man who proceeds with great caution. There he made diligent inquiries of the train schedules to Italy. He attempted a sleeping compartment reservation for the next day, and though explaining that his passports for Italy would be forthcoming, was unsuccessful in getting a ticket. Finally, after much argument, he bargained with the Swiss agent to hold a compartment for him, contingent upon later passports, a pact that he sealed with a tip of twenty francs.

As he left the depot, Elton paused at the telegraph bureau to send a message of one word to an address in Paris, whence it would be relayed to Colonel Rand. The message read "Delayed", code request for the automobiles to be placed in front of Basle.

The shadow followed him to a beer garden nearby on the Bubenberg-Platz, clinging dizzily close to his heels. Having lost the trail out of the Bellevue Palace in the morning, the secret service was taking no risk of a second slip. Elton apparently buried himself in a newspaper for half an hour, sat absently listening to the music and sipping beer through another hour, finally paid his bill, left the hall and took a horse cab. His shadow followed at a discreet distance. Elton smiled as he saw the fellow commit himself to a second horse cab.

The hour had arrived to leave Berne, with no hint of his destination behind him. That would be simple now. He drove through Berne, watching his opportunity. It came as he passed the Kasino. A single motor cab was waiting there for a fare. Elton stopped beside the vehicle, passed his cabman five francs, stepped into the automobile and drove eastward, urging the chauffeur to make all possible speed. Before his shadow could find a motor cab, Elton's car had threaded its way by a devious course back through the heart of the city. Five times Elton changed vehicles before he finally headed north across the Aire to Beundenfeld. At that place he engaged the driver to return the next evening at ten, gave the fellow fifty francs and disappeared into the village.

With an hour to spare, he walked by a roundabout route, keeping clear of traveled roads, to Wankdorf, where he arrived in time to hear the distant whistle of the Zurich express. His Spanish passport was accepted without question on the train, and a few minutes later he was speeding toward Zurich, via Lucerne, in the certainty that the only trail he had left behind him led to Italy.

HIS train crawled up the left bank of the Zurichsee and delivered him at the Central Station at an uncomfortable hour before daybreak. Since his reconnoissance at Zurich would require only

a few hours at most, Elton took a cab at the station, drove to a pretentious hotel on the Parade-Platz, loitered briefly in the lounge, and went by a second cab to an obscure *pension* on Freickgasse. He slept until noon, had breakfast and loitered in his room, out of sight, until three o'clock. His plans for Zurich already were fixed in his mind and he felt no need of rehearsing or checking them, though he chafed at an enforced inaction that was tolling away precious hours.

On leaving the *pension* he chose a closed motor cab in which to explore that part of Zurich that had to do with his final coup in Switzerland. He located the Austrian consulate, a solemn stone building of two stories, about which just now there was no sign of animation. Even the shutters were closed upstairs and down, occupancy revealed only by a thin curl of blue smoke that rose from one of the half dozen chimneys. There were two doors at the front of the building, others at each end, all massive and reenforced with heavy strips of ornamental metal.

The location of the Austrian consulate in relation to other points in his project proved much to his liking. The streets sloped gently to the Stadthaus-Quai, which he had selected for his first destination following a surprise visit to the consulate. The quay, by reason of its proximity to the Zurichsee at the point where the green Limmat came pouring out of the lake, was only a short walk from the Alpen-Quai which skirts across the lakefront to the right. A network of intersecting streets provided avenues of escape from the lakefront should anything in his plan run astray.

Having completed his study of the terrain, Elton hired two motor cabs. One of these he instructed to wait for him at the point where Bahnhofstrasse joins the Alpen-Quai, a hundred meters or less from the Limmat. The other he directed to meet him at the Stadthaus-Quai at eight-thirty o'clock, by which hour darkness would have fallen. Retainers of twenty francs and promises of further prodigal payment insured the punctuality of the cabmen and their patience, if they were compelled to wait for the generous "sightseer from Madrid". His final arrangement consisted of the purchase of a pair of clippers, a shaving set and small tubes of lampblack and carmine pigment.

He dined at the Bolerei. But though he tried to free his mind, now that his plan for the night was complete in every detail, he could not escape an anxious, fretful tension. Tomorrow was September 17th. Von Strindheim's zero hour might be fixed for the early morning of the 18th. Therefore, Elton felt that somehow he must contrive to reach Lyons by nightfall of the next day. A traveler, having no other concern, would find difficulty making that schedule, traveling by train and auto. But Elton knew that the whole force and guile of the Imperial secret service in Switzerland would shortly hound his trail.

CHAPTER VI

HERR ROMBOLZ HAS A SHAVE

SHORTLY before eight o'clock, Elton took a launch across the lake for the Seefeld-Quai, his point of rendezvous with Walters and Pram. He sat in the stern leaning tensely forward, barely conscious of the magic spell of the Zurichsee under the last pink glow of the vanished sun. He attempted to rally himself against this humor, to lose himself in the Alpine grandeur. He fixed his gaze upon the distant peaks, the hoary Myten in the foreground, the huge pyramid of the Bristenstock, the two-humped camel peaks of the Scheerhorn. But he saw them only abstractly. His mission was too portentous, its mysterious possibilities too ominous to the Allied cause, his own chances of success too delicately balanced, for any other thoughts to occupy his mind.

It did not occur to him to doubt that Walters and Pram would be waiting

punctually at the quay. He had shot his orders swiftly at the sergeant. But Walters was a veteran in the service, he knew the meaning of orders; and the habit of obedience at all costs was burned into his being. Walters' brief "yes'r" was a more potent proof that he understood and would go through than the solemn oath of a less seasoned operative. Therefore, Elton felt neither surprise nor relief when he saw his faithful assistant present on the dot as the boat drew up at the isolated quay. Loitering a few meters behind Walters was Pram, the two evidently having decided not to be seen together.

Elton motioned them into the boat, and had the boatman proceed back across the Zurichsee, traveling slowly. He sent Walters to a seat beside the boatman, with instructions to keep the fellow engaged with questions of scenery, while he placed Pram in the stern seat for instructions. The sullen look was gone from Pram's face. His eyes were aglow, his cheeks were losing their waxen cast and he was plainly alert and ready for the unexplained adventure that had brought him to Zurich. He held his tongue, waiting for the captain to speak.

"There's one thing I want to tell you, Pram," Elton began. "In some respects, I'm up against the most trying case I've had to work on. The way things have turned out, everything depends upon your presence here tonight. Yet, it never once occurred to me that you would not make it right on the dot."

"Sure, Cap'n, I'd be here, if I had to climb the Alps," Pram replied, a faint note of injury in his voice. He gave a short chuckle. "That is, once the Cap'n had me pulled off the train. That sure was a boob message I was carrying for the Austrians."

"I was rather suspicious of something of the sort," said Elton, "and was taking no chances. But we've got some pretty large sized chances to take in the next few hours, Pram."

"Good!" exclaimed Pram enthusiastically.

"How are your fingers, Pram? Still soft and educated?"

Pram looked sharply at Elton, pained amazement in his eyes.

"Didn't I give the cap'n my word on that four years ago!" Pram rejoined. "That's all past, and I hope the cap'n never mentions it again. I've made good and kept my word. I'm sorry about that lieutenant affair—but I'm telling you, Cap'n, I did it—"

"Just a minute, Pram," Elton interrupted. "You don't understand. If I had the slightest doubt of what's inside you, I'd never have taken chances on your account. The reason I asked was because I've got a job to put across. There's a safe that's got to be opened, and I've got to depend upon you to open it, even if we have to shoot it open."

Pram blinked slowly at Elton as he tried to fathom whether trick or quirk lay behind the captain's words. Then he shook his head.

"Sorry the cap'n thinks I'm going to backslide," he muttered. "But I'm off that game for life."

"But I'm in earnest, Pram. I'm not trying to test you out. What I'm asking you to do is in line of duty. Does sound odd, doesn't it, me asking you to do this job? But war changes moral values, Pram. What passes for robbery or murder in time of peace has the universal O. K. in time of war. The sky is the limit when one nation is fighting another. The bigger the damage you pass out to the enemy, the bigger the hero you are rated at home. Does that clear things up for you?"

"Well, seeing I've got twenty years to do for telling a lieutenant the truth about himself, maybe it don't matter," said Pram morosely. "But I'm sorry the cap'n didn't have something better than this in mind for me over here."

"When you know how much this may mean, perhaps you'll think better of the job," Elton reassured. "Now come. Buck up and get into this thing with both feet, Pram."

Pram nodded slowly and began rub-

bing his fingertips together as if to test their delicacy of touch.

"If it's the cap'n's orders," he assented glumly.

THE craft nosed its way out of the Zurichsee into the swift Limmat and drew up to a landing at the Stadthaus-Quai. Assuring the boatman that they would return within two hours, Elton led the way across the landing and paused in the shadows for a brief conference. Walters reported with certainty that they had escaped the German agents after leaving the train. They had reached Zurich before noon and had kept out of sight in a room in the Limmat-Quai Hotel, where their presence had excited no attention. Elton quickly bared his plan of raiding the consulate.

"The document we must have is in the consulate safe here," he said. "But remember, even though the safe conceals a plot that may be aimed at thousands of good lives, the Austrians are able to claim immunity from search in neutral Switzerland. So, while we may be heroes once we get through Basle into France, we're ordinary thugs here, and will be treated accordingly if we slip. Don't shoot if it can be avoided. It would be called murder to kill an Austrian here in Zurich, even in self-defense, while we're on this sort of job."

In one of the two motor cabs engaged by Elton, they proceeded to the vicinity of the consulate, left the cab at a curb nearby and sauntered past the house on reconnoissance. Street lights illumined the narrow grounds upon which the building was set. The house remained close shuttered, no ray of light showing from within. Elton wasted no further time, but led the way to the door and swung the knocker.

A male servant answered, and at Elton's request in German to see the Austrian consul, Herr Rombolz, on a mission of great importance, admitted them to the reception hall. Soon a portly Austrian in dressing gown ambled into the room and nodded to his visitors with a grunt of inquiry. Elton caught the resemblance of the consul to the Herr Oberst Rombolz. He had the same long sweeping mustache, blunt eyes and solemn face. The Herr Oberst's claim to kinship with the consul at Zurich could not be disputed.

"I am here from a secret meeting with Herr Oberst Rombolz," Elton said impressively. "What I have to say will surprise you very much."

The stolid face was moved to an expression of unsuspecting interest. He invited the three into a living room, with another grunt and a jerk of his thumb, and closed the door behind them.

Elton accepted a chair and, as Rombolz sat down, coolly unmasked his purpose.

"My meeting with the Herr Oberst unhappily did not serve my purpose," he announced. "His subterfuges gave me the idea that I would meet with better luck here. You have among your papers the plan of a concentration of German agents at Lyons. These agents have been reporting to you, and to your legation at Berne, for their orders. As Allied agents, we intend to have those papers. It is to your advantage, Herr Rombolz, to turn them over without violence."

Herr Rombolz gave a sharp start; his protuberant brown eyes threatened to pop out of their sockets. Then his face settled back into its phlegmatic stare. He sat puffing slowly at his pipe for the better part of a minute.

"This is Zurich, which is on neutral ground," he muttered. "You have no right to invade my premises."

"Herr Rombolz, you're not childish enough to argue such things, unless your purpose is to gain time!" snapped Elton. He brought forth a small French automatic. "We have no time to waste. Are you going to open your safe for us, or are you going to force us to violence!"

The threat jolted Rombolz. Terror

distended his glassy eyes. But an unexpected circumstance shaped his decision. The sagging of his jaw permitted his heavy meerschaum pipe to slip from his mouth. It fell to the floor and the bowl shattered. Rombolz' eyes dropped to his precious pipe. Fear gave way to a slowly rising rage. When he looked up, his face was a livery red, his eyes glowering a sullen defiance.

"*Ach, Gott,*" he raged. "Twenty years my good pipe has served me and now you have ruined it. Nothing will I give you, swine!"

Elton pocketed his weapon and turned to Pram and Walters.

"All right, Pram," he directed. "Find the safe and open it. Walters, you can keep the Austrian consul company. I'll check the house over and see that we're not interrupted."

EXCEPT for the servant who had answered the door, Elton found no one else in the house. It was evident that such a possibility as an Allied raid on an Austrian consulate at Zurich had not seriously fretted the heavy witted Rombolz. There was another deduction, an uncomfortable one, which Elton drew from the many unoccupied rooms. Secret service agents, assigned to the mischief at Lyons, had moved on from Zurich; further confirmation that September 18th was their day of action.

He secured the doorman without a struggle, bound and gagged him securely and locked the prisoner in a bedroom. Returning through the house, he found that Pram had made short work of locating the safe, a small steel combination box secreted behind a sliding panel in the Rombolz library. Pram was at work on the combination, his ear pressed close against the steel door, while his sensitive fingers manipulated the combination. Pram held up a hand for silence, rubbed his fingers lightly across the square of sandpaper Elton had furnished, and resumed his work. Returning to the living room, Elton found Walters seated close in front of Herr Rombolz, the two glaring at each other in vigilant silence.

"Three times this walrus has moved his chair," Walters complained. "It was only an inch or two—but he's not of the nervous kind, Cap'n. He's up to some mischief. I just warned him in my best Dutch not to move again."

"I have plans for him that will keep his mind fully engaged for some time, Walters," Elton replied with a smile. "I am sorry to have to do this, but war makes strange necessities. Besides, I warned him that he should open the safe and spare himself."

Elton had brought from the kitchen a bowl of water. He laid out a small safety shaving outfit, dipped the brush and regarded the staring Rombolz.

"On second thought," he told Walters, "I believe you'd better tie him to his chair and gag him before I proceed. He's going to take this operation terribly to heart. Take off his dressing gown and put it on over your coat, Walters."

Herr Rombolz struggled desperately, but to no avail, against his thongs when Elton began brushing lather into the luxuriant Austrian mustache. Another precious Rombolz possession, Elton had guessed, one that represented perhaps longer than twenty years of tender care and vain pride. Rombolz almost succeeded in forcing his protest through his gag as Elton's razor began stripping the consul's upper lip of its hirsute glory.

When it was gone from the Rombolz face, Elton saw that the mustache had served its wearer to good purpose by covering a broad, sagging, hideous mouth. A run of the clippers across the fellow's shaggy brows and at his short bristling forelocks, and Herr Rombolz bore faint resemblance to the Herr Rombolz of a moment before. A deft touch of lampblack under his eyes, a few expert lines in carmine from the tubes Elton had purchased in Zurich, and Herr Rombolz had lost his identity.

LESS than half an hour had passed since they entered the consulate. Something more than an hour could elapse before the time element again would become desperate. Elton left Pram to his own devices at the safe. If Pram succeeded in tapping the combination promptly, the raid promised to succeed even beyond Elton's most optimistic expectations. Barring interruption, there was the chance that they would be able to escape from Switzerland before an alarm could be sounded, leaving the consul and his servant prisoners behind their own doors.

Another half hour tugged sorely at Elton's patience while he waited in the room with Rombolz and Walters. The Austrian, whose first reaction to the indignities forced upon him was one of anguish, now sat with a vindictive hatred stewing in his eyes. Twice he tried to move his chair, each time to be sharply warned by Walters. A third warning and a fourth, and Elton strapped the fellow's legs to the chair so that further progress was impossible.

"If you've got any idea of ambling your way to your alarm system—" Elton began, but did not finish the sentence.

A strange change had come suddenly over the Austrian's face. His eyes were glowing now with a malignant scorn. Rombolz' thoughts were as transparent as the lines of an open book. He had succeeded in his wile. Elton dropped to the floor and stripped away a section of carpet with his penknife. A small metal square set in the oak met his eyes. He replaced the carpet, rose from the floor, sat down in front of Herr Rombolz and nonchalantly crossed his legs.

"Stupid of me to let you do that, wasn't it?" he addressed the consul quietly. "Especially stupid, considering that I thought of such a possibility long ago. My mistake was, I was watching the walls instead of the floor."

Elton's apparent serenity during the next few minutes was no part of his inner turmoil. Arrival of a detachment of Swiss civil police from the station at Zurich could only bring his mission to precarious extremity, even to an inglorious failure, unless Pram succeeded at the safe before the police arrived. He made a rapid calculation. Probably fifteen minutes would elapse before the Zurich police reached the consulate. If only one or two responded, the situation might not prove so difficult.

"No matter what happens, Walters," he cautioned his assistant, "your job is to look cool and leave the situation in my hands. Remember, not even the war gives us the right to shoot a neutral officer. Oddly enough, there's such a crime as murder still on the statutes."

"Yes'r," said Walters, responding to his instructions with an air of unconcern.

In the minutes that tolled slowly by, Elton's inner restlessness left him. He felt only the cool nerve and serenity that came to him with critical danger. He glanced at his watch to note that ten minutes had elapsed since Rombolz' hapless summons had gone over the wires, when Pram came into the room, a silent shadow, an empty look on his face. In his hands he carried several sheets of flimsy.

"Reckon this is what you wanted, Cap'n," he said without enthusiasm. "Well, here it is."

Elton seized the paper. At a glance he caught the legend in German:

"Plan for Military Intelligence Operation, necessary to project of the great General Staff for an Italian offensive: *Vernichten Weg.*"

Rombolz managed a groan through his gag at sight of the secret document in enemy hands. But Elton had time only to verify the heading before there was the crash of feet on the flagging outside the consulate. The knocker dropped heavily. Elton stuffed the document into his pocket and faced Walters and Pram.

"Stay close behind me and be very cool," he said. "We will be on our way to the French border in a few minutes

now, if nothing goes wrong."

Not two, but twenty Swiss police were outside in high excitement when Elton opened the door. The front rank had drawn pistols.

"Ah, you are most prompt, gentlemen," Elton addressed them in German. "In the name of Herr Rombolz, we have seized a scoundrel whom we found at large in the consulate. Perhaps an attempt has been made to secure important official documents. Enter, gentlemen, freely, since we have your man firmly secured for you!"

Herr Rombolz squirmed frantically, his eyes rolling in a despairing frenzy, as he saw the friendly police of Zurich ushered into the consulate by the audacious intruder. It was not altogether what Elton said, but the easy assurance of his manner, that misled the Swiss. Rombolz threw all his strength into his struggle to cry out against the deception. But Herr Rombolz not even remotely resembled his former self. His struggles only brought an ugly imprecation upon his head from an officer of the Zurich police.

"You will pardon us," Elton addressed the leader, "if we hasten to inform our headquarters of what has happened here, since it may have an international aspect. Who can say? And you will earn our deep gratitude if you will hold that rascal bound and gagged right here for a few minutes. I am certain Herr Rombolz will express his gratitude to you in his own way at his first opportunity."

"Glad to oblige," said the officer, with a grave bow.

CHAPTER VII

THE LITTLE BARON

REACHING the street, Elton led the way at a run to the motor cab. The three leaped in and urged the cabman to speed to the Stadthaus-Quai. Elton paid the fellow a hundred francs, warned him against saying where he had delivered his fares and released him. They half crossed the quay to a beech tree, where Elton left Pram and Walters behind with directions to walk west to the lake and north to Bahnhofstrasse, where they would wait for him in a green motor cab parked at the curb. He then went alone to the boatman and gave the fellow hurried instructions. The boatman was to turn back into the Zurichsee and proceed at high speed to Stara, twelve miles down the lake.

"If you find a man waiting there, one in a small straw hat and heavy brown overcoat, tell him your boat is to bring him to Mr. Gotthard," Elton equivocated. "If he did not come on tonight's train from Berne, wait for him until after the train in the morning. If he does not arrive then, you may return. Here are two hundred francs to pay you for your trouble. Remember, this is very important, and you must travel fast. Deliver your man to the Limmat-Quai Hotel, if you find him."

The boatman set his stem against the current and headed full speed for the Zurichsee. Elton, following down the river bank, saw the craft put into the lake and speed diagonally to the southwest, its course marked by the dancing ray of its searchlight. In a few minutes he had joined the others in the cab. They proceeded east to Renweg, where Elton stopped the cab and directed Walters and Pram to go separately and at once to the station. There they would take a first class compartment on the nine-thirty express for Basle.

"Board the train now, and not at the last minute," he ordered. "Use your Spanish passports and pay no attention to any one. The train leaves in just twenty-seven minutes. I will meet you at the station in Basle."

Elton rode on for several squares and drove a bargain with the cabman to go at high speed to Lucerne to inquire for a Herr Strobert at the Hotel Rebstock on Lowenstrasse. He then went to the station and entered a third class compartment of the Basle express.

Four others occupied the compart-

ment, all Swiss of the lower middle class who spoke German among themselves and kept the unventilated compartment black with their heavy pipes. Nevertheless, Elton felt that he had never occupied a more gloriously comfortable space as the express pulled out and slowly gained momentum. Zurich was safely behind. Probably the police still were standing guard over the helpless Rombolz.

Or, if the Austrian consul finally had gained the freedom of his voice, the net was spreading even now in many directions. But the Swiss police could be depended upon to take the broad trails Elton had left behind. They would locate the cabman in short order. He would describe the dash to the Stadthaus-Quai, the mysterious launch that shot out into the Zurichsee. There also would be reports of the motor cab that had raced across the Limmat on the road to Lucerne. By the time higher authority could be enrolled in the quest, and all Switzerland set in a net by the German legation at Berne, Elton expected to be safely in France.

Consideration of his immediate safety, however, was far in the background of Elton's thoughts as the train gained momentum. The document for which he had come to Switzerland against the risks that had beset him, reposed in his pocket unread. He knew that, should he fall under suspicion, the captured Austrian papers would land him without further question in the nearest Swiss prison. But greater than the danger of carrying them was the necessity of reading them. In extremity, if circumvented in crossing the frontier, he might find a way to wire a warning to Colonel Rand at headquarters.

Two hours of jabbering were required to tire the voluble Swiss tongues in the compartment. One by one Elton's fellow travelers finally dropped off to sleep. When the last of them was snoring sonorously, he brought the crumpled papers from his pocket and read.

The first hurried scanning of the document told him its capture had been worth any risk. No secret service had ever tied into an intended military operation to more vital purpose. Success of an Italian offensive, in fact the launching of such an attack with present hope of success, depended first upon Von Strindheim's success at Lyons. It was Von Strindheim's job to destroy the great Mont Cenis tunnel, by which Allied reenforcements must be shunted from France through the Alps into Italy.

Impossible. Lareaux had used that word in dismissing such a possibility. Elton remembered that the Prussians had plotted against the great eight-mile hole through the Alps as a preliminary to their great June offensive. Success of such a plot in June might have changed history, since it was Allied reserves, train after train of them, that saved the day against the Austro-German avalanche of the Spring.

But this new attempt had been worked out with a diabolical cunning. Elton saw bared a plot that did not depend upon a mere overwhelming of French or Italian guards at either end of the tunnel. It was a daring plan, one for a Von Strindheim's faculties. The troops at the tunnel would be helpless.

Von Strindheim and thirty men, disguised as Polish-American volunteers in French uniform, were to board the International Express at Lyons, seize the train after it entered the great Mont Cenis tunnel, and close it behind them with heavy charges of high explosive. Months would be required to repair the damage. The Simplon passes would be barred through neutral Switzerland. Fatal delays would beset reenforcements sent to the Italian front by transport from Marseilles.

Elton searched the document for vital details. A section was devoted to the urgent necessity of absolute secrecy. Copies, numbered and signed for, were furnished only to the Austrian consul at Zurich and the German ministry at Berne, for their guidance in instructing trusted agents of the Central Empire.

Even these agents were to be told as little as possible. The explosives were to be sent through Switzerland to Geneva; by launch to France, by camouflaged French military autos to Lyons. The thirty selected operatives were to report their arrival at Lyons to No. 19 Rue Fallon. They would then find billets in the country, and concentrate in Lyons the night before they were to board their train.

Agent 3 was to have absolute authority, and to be personally responsible to the Emperor for success of the plan, once his force and explosives were in hand at Lyons. He was personally to accompany and direct the movement. The necessary uniforms were being furnished him from German espionage supplies at Berne. Under no circumstances was any copy of the plan, or any extract of its vital parts, to be entrusted on enemy soil.

One detail was missing. Date was referred to only under the conventional military symbol "M-Day". All concerned would be notified of the calendar date of M-Day at the proper moment. But Elton, as his mind grasped the omen of the desperate German plan, found no doubt of what day was meant by M-Day. And that day was September 18th, which allowed him only tomorrow in which to reach Lyons.

AFTER reading and rereading the document, Elton rolled it into a wad and cast it out the window. The oppressive uncertainty of the past few weeks was lifted from his shoulders. Even the narrowing time margin no longer harassed him. There was tomorrow in which to dash across France; and he would reach Lyons with the night before him—not to grope but to strike. 19 Rue Fallon. The address at which trusted agents of the Empire were to report their arrival in Lyons could be nothing less than the rendezvous of the Prussian agent in charge—Baron Erich Wolf von Strindheim.

The express swept across the Rhine into Basle at one o'clock, three and a half hours out of Zurich. Elton loitered at the station until Walters and Pram hove into sight. Signaling them to follow, he took a cab and drove west to the darkened Bindesplatz.

There was no time to be wasted in Basle, hotbed of German agents. Nor did he intend to risk a farewell to Switzerland through the front door, since there was the danger of a last minute alarm from Zurich. When the others reported, he set out at once by a roundabout course for the open country, where the Swiss vigil was perfunctory. Once on the French border, there would be vigilant eyes they could not hope to escape. But a French challenge would be music to Elton's ears.

Despite the caution in which the three moved through the darkness, they were picked up promptly by a French patrol guarding the approaches to Basle. The French frontier guards escorted them close behind fixed bayonets to the commandant of the main barrier. The French commander was skeptical, since the three prisoners carried no papers of identification to account for their presence on French soil.

Elton offered no objection to detention. Until his transportation reported, there was no haste. But at daybreak a brief conversation with the French Deuxième Bureau Chief at Belfort over the military wire brought release and apology from his captor.

Arrival of the French automobile shortly thereafter set them speeding toward Lyons. At the point of rendezvous, they changed to the awaiting American car and roared on at a dizzy pace to the south and east, four hundred kilometers ahead of them along the twisting route Besançon—Bourg-en-Bresse—Lyons.

Elton sat in the rear seat with Walters, impervious to the jolting that at times threw him against the top of the car. Walters was silent but jubilant with the free air of France in his nostrils, the scent of action ahead. Pram sat in

front beside the driver, glumly hugging his seat and finding no joy in his surroundings. When they paused at Besançon for lunch, Pram sat slumped at the table in a sullen silence.

"What are you so gloomy about this morning, Pram?" Elton baited him cheerily. "If there's any one ought to be smiling this morning, it's you."

Pram picked at his food, unmoved.

"You've put over a big service, whether you realize it or not," Elton persisted. "We wouldn't have gotten anywhere at Zurich without you."

"Glad if I obliged the cap'n," Pram muttered caustically, without looking up. "But it's nothing for me to gloat about, being let out of jail long enough to prowl a safe. If it hadn't been for throwing the cap'n down, I'd dropped off at Basle. Come near doing it anyhow. But my word's good, even if it does cost twenty years in out of the sun, time off for good behavior."

Elton sat back in blank amazement at Pram's words.

"You don't mean, Pram, you think I'm going to let you go back to your little bailiwick at Paris, do you? Is that what's been fretting you all morning?"

Pram's eyes came up. He sat blinking as the import of Elton's words slowly filled his mind.

"You don't think, Cap'n, they might let me out of that jam?" he asked, almost in disbelief.

"See here, Pram. If I'm not much mistaken, they'll do more than forget that ridiculous sentence. I happen to know there's a lot of criticism in the United States over these hardboiled sentences that are being passed out. But aside from that, Pram, you've done such a service that—well, if there's any justice left in the world, you'll get a handsome assignment back to duty. I'll see to it that you have full credit for your work, even if I do not report the details."

"Cap'n, if I get another chance like that, I'll make good!" exclaimed Pram joyously. "I'll give the Cap'n my word I'll never talk up to another lieutenant no matter what happens!"

"If I had my way, I think I'd make you a captain for what you've done," laughed Elton, "and assign the lieutenant who made complaint against you to your command. But I'm afraid that wouldn't appeal to Colonel Rand's sense of humor."

"A job of private in your outfit sounds better than that to me," affirmed Pram eagerly.

"I think you can safely consider that settled, Pram. Particularly if we finish our job at Lyons."

Out of the long afternoon ride, Elton's plan shaped itself deliberately. Von Strindheim would have a few wary shadows out, with a watchful eye on French headquarters and French movements. But the Prussian would stay close to cover himself, holding his uniformed men in hand, well knowing that the Allied Secret Service was on the qui vive in Lyons.

There had been ample time for the German attachés at Berne to receive warning of Elton's coup at Zurich. But the Germans would not dare risk a wire message in code or cipher from Switzerland to France. And before a spy-runner could thread his way through the frontier and into Lyons, Elton expected to be well ahead of him. And Elton argued that the Germans would not take desperate risks merely to warn Von Strindheim. With their attempt on Mont Cenis so close at hand and so critical in importance, it was more likely that Prussian military desperation would choose to let Von Strindheim take his own risks, no matter how slender the hope of success.

As for invading the Von Strindheim haunt on the Rue Fallon, Elton discarded that as a dangerous risk. The Prussian, with thirty men and stores of high explosive, would be able to extend a hearty welcome to any force that might be hurled upon his rendezvous. Nor could he be taken at the depot or aboard the International Express en route to Mont Cenis, without a clash that

would be costly in human life. Also, at the first alarm, Von Strindheim's craft would find some avenue of swift exit from the scene.

The impending grapple with Von Strindheim warmed his heart. Though the Prussian's capture was of incidental importance to the blocking of the Prussian offensive against Italy, there would be a deep personal satisfaction in having Von Strindheim again in his net.

Three months had elapsed since he outwitted the baron in the spymaster's stronghold under Paris, only to have his prisoner escape later from the French at Vincennes. Von Strindheim, always the craftiest and most resourceful of the German higher agents, had become more elusive and cunning than ever since that misadventure. Elton had good reason to know that he had but one chance of taking the baron, even with his present advantage, and that by means of a suddenly sprung, carefully concealed trap; one that Von Strindheim could not reasonably foresee.

By the time he had reached Marieux, Elton had settled upon his plan and mapped out the details. He stopped at the village long enough to telegraph to Colonel Rand at headquarters a message in cipher:

SUCCESSFUL IN SWITZERLAND. APPROACHING LYONS. ARRANGE FOR ELDERLY FRENCH OFFICER OF HIGH RANK MEET ME HÔTEL DE VILLE TONIGHT AT ELEVEN. RUSH TWO AMERICAN MACHINE GUN PLATOONS FULLY EQUIPPED TO LYONS. HAVE COMMANDER REPORT ME HÔTEL DE VILLE AT ELEVEN. THIS IS OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE.—ELTON.

From Marieux, Elton slowed down to a snail's pace to avoid reaching Lyons before dark. There was time enough, now, and to spare. At an outlying inn he secured lodgings, had a leisurely dinner and entered the city afoot, leaving Walters and Pram behind without explanation, much to their disgust.

He hailed the first taxicab, drove to the central station, then proceeded through Rue Fallon, choosing a destination that would take him past No. 19. As he passed the Prussian rendezvous, he saw three soldiers in French uniform loitering outside the building. They would have passed, even to the vigilant gendarmes, as soldiers taking the air outside their billet. But to Elton they confirmed the assembly of Von Strindheim's men, Prussian sentinels outside the lair.

When he reported at eleven at the Hôtel de Ville, it was to find that his telegram to Rand had borne fruit. An ancient colonel of Hussars, retired long since from service at the Front, was there in waiting, together with an American infantry captain, who had brought two war-strength machine gun platoons in swift reconnoissance cars from a distant training center. A conference of an hour with these officers, and Elton returned by taxicab to the country inn and turned in for the night.

THE International Express, en route from Paris to Turin via the great Mont Cenis tunnel, was due to stop at Lyons at 7:00 A. M. A small column of French soldiers, carrying full field equipment, threaded the narrow streets at route step toward the railway station. Early morning pedestrians roused themselves for a moment from their war weariness to wave a cheery greeting.

At the head of the soldiers, at the right of the first squad, marched their commander, a dapper young officer in faultless uniform. His soldiers, all powerfully built men, towered physically above him; yet the clearcut features of the officer, his air of natural superiority and easy *sang-froid,* set him out above the larger men, who plodded along stolidly in the manner of battle-wearied poilus returning to the Front. Behind them rattled a small French army truck, bearing what purported to be their heavier equipment.

They were passing through a thoroughfare of small shops, when accosted

from the curb by a grizzled French officer in dress uniform. The French officer had lost an arm and the lower half of a leg, and walked with difficulty, leaning on a cane. His breast was plastered with battle decorations, his insignia of rank proclaimed him a colonel of cavalry.

"I will detain you but a moment, my Lieutenant," said the colonel, saluting the junior with a show of deference.

"I regret, my Colonel," the lieutenant spoke up politely but firmly. "We march under pressing orders. Permit me to say that we are Polish-American volunteers directed to the Italian front for service. If you wish to inspect my orders, permit that I have my men continue on their way while we confer."

The colonel held up a protesting hand.

"My dear Lieutenant, I have no wish to see your orders," he said. "It is that I would pay you military honor, monsieur; you and your soldiers who have come so far. I wish to extend you the honor of an inspection, in the name of France. I will not long detain you. Please to bring your men to a line!"

The lieutenant showed momentary annoyance, but accepted the inevitable and saluted his acceptance. A sharp command, accompanied by several even sharper motions of his hand, brought his thirty men into a single line, facing the colonel. The lieutenant took his place in front of the line, snapped to attention and saluted again. If the officer's suspicions were remotely stirred by the colonel's delay in starting down the line, or by an indistinct patter of guarded feet behind his position, he gave no indication, since military training demanded steadiness in ranks at inspection.

Behind his rigid line, olive drab machine gun crews were pouring silently into the streets from adjacent shops and hallways, their weapons set up. A few deft movements, and six mounted machine guns covered the rear of the masquerading Teuton force. A vaguely familiar, but definitely ominous, voice at his ear sent the lieutenant spinning on his heels, his hand groping at his holster. But an instant's survey told him the utter hopelessness of his plight.

"My dear Baron von Strindheim," said Elton with a serene smile, "permit me to compliment you upon the excellent steadiness in ranks of your command. Even now they do not move a muscle, nor do they appear to understand what has happened. Under the circumstances, will you be good enough to order them to stack arms and thus avoid their needless destruction?"

The seasoned Von Strindheim gave no display of his feelings. Without hesitation, he barked the order at his men.

"I was hardly expecting to see you again so soon, Elton," Von Strindheim said coolly. "However, since your presence is due wholly to my own grave stupidity, I shall offer neither excuse nor complaint."

"I must correct you, Baron," Elton rejoined. "The stupidity of your superiors in Switzerland is chiefly responsible."

Von Strindheim's face registered a superior scorn.

"I had reference, my dear Captain," he replied stiffly, "to my stupidity in not disposing of you at Paris some months ago, when opportunity presented itself. I am certain I should not make such an error in judgment a second time."

"You flatter me, Baron. In fact, you almost arouse my regret that the French will take no chances of letting you escape this time. Europe will seem dull in your—absence."

"Your boast," sneered Von Strindheim, "would be more convincing if you did not use such superior force. Strange, since you no longer work with finesse, you did not think to bring a brigade with you to surround me, my dear Elton."

"A brigade would not have been too great a compliment to pay you, Baron," Elton rejoined smilingly. "But you must remember our brigades face a long hard trek across the Rhine, now that your Kaiser's last hope has been knocked flat. Now if you'll assemble your men back in squad column, we'll resume the march to the depot—en route to Vincennes."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

MR. L. H. McMAHAN, who contributed an earlier letter to the Camp-fire on the subject of cougar, comments further on the relative speed of deer and the big cats:

Salem, Oregon

I know that cougars kill some deer, and I also know that cougars kill many horses and colts. A cougar will lie by a water-hole or, taking advantage of the wind, slip up close to a band of horses and make a rush for a pony. The horses, in trying to avoid this rush, run into each other's way, and one is killed. On the other hand, I have noted in light snow many places where cougar tried to catch deer, and in every instance the deer escaped, if the cougar had to make more than one jump to get the deer. I have followed their tracks in the pursuit of deer they did not kill, and found that they never ran more than 200 yards, and in no case did they ever catch the deer.

I am safe in saying that no animal can catch a well antelope, two weeks old, except under the following condition—that the antelope has come in off the desert to drink and, at the time of the pursuit, is water-logged.

DR. L. E. HIBBARD, of Burns, Harney County, Oregon, years ago had two wolfhounds and one greyhound, supposed to be the three fastest dogs in the State of Oregon. He found it utterly impossible, with those dogs and horses, to catch even a two weeks' old antelope, although three of the men relayed the dogs on the circles the antelope made. The horses and dogs were run down, and the antelope escaped.

On another occasion he muzzled the dogs and got a baby antelope chasing up and down the gullies in the rim rock. After running the antelope for an hour, the greyhound, instead of following the other dogs around, cut across and headed the antelope off in a gully and it was caught. The doe came up to within forty feet of the dogs, facing them. The greyhound, which was the fastest dog of the three—young, hardened

by chasing coyotes, and in perfect condition, and the swiftest dog I have ever seen—started from a crouching position, the antelope whirled half around and the dog never got within twenty feet of it. This was repeated five times.

I ONCE broke the left hind leg of an antelope in the evening and did not find it until the next morning. It had lain in the sagebrush all night and was cold. I was mounted on an extra good horse and I tried to get within roping distance of that antelope, but even though my horse was running on ideal open ground, it was utterly impossible for the horse to hold its own with the antelope.

I note in William Wells' letter he challenges me to show him a cougar, dead or alive or mounted, even nine feet from tip to tip. He is now living within 120 miles of the McKenzie Bridge, with a perfectly good road between him and that place. He can drive from his home to the McKenzie Bridge and back in considerably less than one day. Harry Hayes, a trapper and guide, has hanging in his store a cougar hide that measures nine feet six inches in length and thirty inches across the narrowest part of the skin—that is, at the flank.

Smith Taylor at McKenzie Bridge, who is in charge of the Ranger station, told me that he saw a cougar skin hanging in Eugene about thirty years ago that measured eleven feet four inches. I measured a cougar before he was skinned that was caught by Billie Buck, in a deadfall on Cape Ridge in Lane County, which measured a little over ten feet eight inches.

A. E. Headrick, whose word I have never heard any one question and whose reputation in the community for truth is as good as that of any man in this city, told me that in '74 he was with his father when he killed a cougar in the Alsea Valley that was so astonishingly large they measured it, and it measured an even twelve feet, and that its arm was as big around as the arm of his pony. I have no reason to doubt this statement.

Dell Officer, at Izee, in Grant County, killed a cougar seven years ago that measured more than ten feet.

IN THIS regard, I call your attention to the fact that the cougar of early days, when game was so plentiful in this country, grew larger than they do now. They were seldom hunted and, having an abundance of food, they were not stunted and lived to be fully developed. In these days of scarcity of game, especially of rabbits, a cougar as a rule has not enough to eat to fully develop him, and he is so persistently hunted that he does not live to old age.

Another thing is that cougar in the Rocky Mountain States are possibly not as large as they are in Oregon. For instance, the black-tail deer in the Willamette Valley will average about one-third larger than they do in the southern part of the state. So far as I know they are of the same species. —L. H. McMAHAN

A READER regrets the passing of another illusion:

Muskegon, Michigan

Well, we've already been told that the story of William Tell was of questioned parentage, but now ye professors are wagging their beards over Winkelried. Well, maybe Winky did not take all those lances in his manly embrace; maybe it was two other fellows.

Mr. Oppenheimer's statement that this was true of a later battle and not in Switzerland at all but in Italy brings to mind S. Huddleston's famous quip about that Dryasdust rummaging in the British Museum who had discovered that the Iliad was not Homer's work at all but that of another man of the same name!

SO AFTER losing Wilhelm Tell we must give up Winkelried! Well, that's not so startling as it seems. Haven't we been told that Caesar never said, "You too, Brutus!" and that neither did Galileo, upon being compelled to retract his statement that the earth gravitated around the sun, say under his breath, "Eppur si muove!" And Socrates did not comment on the hemlock thusly, "It is less bitter than Xantippe's tongue!"

We wonder uneasily how much longer we'll be allowed to believe that Nathan Hale said, "I only wish I had more than one life to give to my country."

'Tis true, we were half-conscious right along that we were being flamboozled, but they were beautiful illusions. Somebody had to shatter it all and bring us back to this cold, cruel world! Why, they even tell us that it wasn't Nelson who said, "England expects every man will do his duty," and that the Spanish-American War was brought about by two newspapers' hysterical statements.

Ah, this is a dreary world! —A. A. DUMONT

AN interesting bit on the derivation of some popular Western terms:

Laredo, Texas

I have often been somewhat amused by the misuse of some of the commonest Spanish (or Latin-American) words that are corrupted by our Westerners, and in the February 1st number I notice some (mis)information concerning two words commonly used by riders and ropers—"hackamore" and "McCarte" (sic) although the latter is sometimes spelled McCarty.

Hackamore is simply the corruption of the Spanish word *jáquima*, meaning a muzzle or a nose-band bridle. It is the word used by the Spanish speaking people to signify a dog muzzle, as well as the usual form of a nose bridle. It is readily seen how the corrupted word came into use, as the proper pronunciation of the Spanish word is "háckima", with the accent on the first syllable, quite similar to hackamore.

THE Mexican word for rope is *mecate*—not Mac anything, and it is ridiculous to trace the derivation of the term to anything Irish. Something like this occurred in Manila, when our troops were there in 1898. A parish church in that city was called San Pedro Macati, with the accent on the last syllable. But the soldiers soon turned it into St. Peter McCarty, which satisfied many that it was named after some good old Irish saint.

Our familiar word "buckaroo", so frequently used by the Western writers who seldom have traveled further west than Pittsburg, is merely a corruption of the Spanish word *vaquero*, meaning a cowman, or cowboy, as we have it. It is a weird corruption, however, for the accent is forcibly changed from the second syllable in the Spanish word to the last syllable in the hybrid imitation.

This is merely for general information, and not for the sake of criticizing those who use the corruptions, under the mistaken notion that they are "real Wild West." —WILLARD W. GREGG

WILLIAM WELLS, as will be inferred from another column in this section, has not yet got his last controversy off his hands, and here he is, keen on the scent of another. While under ordinary circumstances, of course, we don't propose to foster what Arthur O. Friel aptly calls a "word war," among members of our Writers' Brigade, some of the points raised in the following correspondence about old Indian days are worthy of more than passing note by any one interested in Americana:

Portland, Oregon

After reading the picturesque story of the boyhood of Sitting Bull, one is forced to the conclusion that our red brothers whom he consulted loaded Stanley Vestal up to the guards. They will do that, you know, when white strangers come around prying into their affairs. The account of the way in which Sitting Bull received his name is, to use the vernacular, a peach. Many other statements are also amusing. The women folding the *white* tents, the plodding pack-mules, etc. Also I fail to grasp why the Sioux carried, when on a horse-lifting raid, empty saddle pads which could be stuffed with grass.

And the loping, loping, loping, of the Sioux war party in search of an enemy. My Gosh!

HOWEVER, let us get down to concrete facts. Mr. Vestal says that Sitting Bull was born in 1831 and that he passed his boyhood in a land where, as yet, "no shadow of the white invader had yet fallen." Sure.

Now the country of the Dakotah of the plains, called by the first French trappers and traders the Sioux, was the valley of the North Platte River and a part of the way northward toward the Missouri. They couldn't go all the way because the Blackfeet wouldn't let them, and they couldn't go westward on to the Sweetwater because they were afraid of the Crows. As a matter of fact, the Crows held the Sioux in utter contempt, and the Crow war parties rode pretty much where they pleased through the Sioux country.

DURING 1831-2-3 steamboats made regular trips up the Missouri as far as the mouth of the Yellowstone, supplying the numerous trading posts along the river, and the artist Catlin was picturing all the tribes, including the Sioux. The wagon road up the Platte, afterward a part of the Oregon Trail, which ran through the heart of the Sioux country, was well traveled. Bonneville was taking his wagon trains over it, up the Sweetwater and over on to Green River; and Sublett had gone up it and to Wind River; Ashley had traveled it with his pack-trains, also with wheeled pieces of artillery all carrying out trade goods and bringing back furs and robes. Fort Laramie had been established, and white trappers were on every stream and all through the mountains.

Perhaps, though, the weather was cloudy and the whites didn't cast shadows.

Mr. Vestal says that the country of the Sioux was too cold to raise horses. This of course will be news to the farmers and stockmen who live in that country today.

—WM. WELLS

Sent on to Mr. Vestal, the author of the Sitting Bull articles, the above evoked this response from him:

The University of Oklahoma,
Norman, Oklahoma

I have your letter containing that of Mr. William Wells, who questions some of the statements made in my first article on Sitting Bull. Of course you realize that a few chapters taken from a long book are peculiarly open to attack,

because most of the supporting information is left out. I hope Mr. Wells will delay sentence until he reads my book, which will be out next summer, I think, published by the Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. However, as you suggest that I reply to his letter now, I do so.

I think Mr. Wells and I must be kindred spirits, for the way he pitches into me is exactly the way I attacked the old yarns when I went to work on this job. In my opinion, the first duty of a historian is skepticism, and a determination to verify everything. Mr. Wells may prefer old books and newspaper articles to the statements of living men of high reputation, but I don't. They both have to pass the test of verification. We folks in Oklahoma may not know everything, but we are mighty touchy as to our knowledge of Indians. We think we know our Indians here, for they are part of us. Our governor is an Indian, our Will Rogers is an Indian, the Vice-President of the U.S.A. is an Indian, etc.

I GOT my information on Sitting Bull from a life-long acquaintance with Plains Indians. That sort of friendship runs in my family, for my step-father was one of Bancroft's men assigned to the Cheyenne history, my uncle adopted a full-blood Arapaho boy, and for the last thirty years or so many of my best friends have been Indians. In fact, there are hundreds of American Indians at the university where I teach. I myself have been given two Indian names. I have lived in Oklahoma among Indians since the Spanish War. To me they are just folks, and mighty fine folks, most of them.

I spent three years' time in making this research. I read every available record and report of the War Department on Indian affairs, combed the Library of Congress, the Bureau of Ethnology in Washington, the archives of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police and Dominion Government in Canada, besides a great number of unpublished papers, including those of Major James McLaughlin, Indian Agent at Standing Rock. I also wrote to every surviving officer, trader, scout, and interpreter of whom I could learn, and talked with all I could meet. Moreover, I visited every tribe in the States and Canada which had contact with Sitting Bull (with two exceptions), and talked with more than one hundred old Indians who had known Sitting Bull personally. The other two tribes supplied information to me through old-timers who had worked on their history for a lifetime. All these Indians were interviewed about the same events through different interpreters at times and places far apart. Many of them wrote in their own languages for me so that I could submit the story to more than one interpreter. I do not pretend to be infallible, but I had twice as much stuff as I could use in one book and therefore left out everything that I considered at all doubtful. Truth is notoriously stranger than fiction.

NOW as to specific points which Mr. Wells mentions:

I don't know how many old Indian fighters Mr. Wells has talked with. I have talked with a good many, including such old-timers as Captain Luther North of the Pawnee scouts, Ben Clark, W. P. Zahn, Chip Creighton, and dozens more. I wish Mr. Wells would read what Homer Wheeler says of Indian boys as fighters in his "Buffalo Days." And I would like to call attention to the fact that the story of Sitting Bull's first deed was repeatedly printed during his lifetime, in the very books which Mr. Wells seems to think so much better than my work. I merely added the details as to the boy's costume, his words, and the names of the men who were present. An Indian had no chance to get away with any lies about his exploits in battle. It was the white men on the frontier who could draw the long bow with impunity.

Mr. Wells objects to my statement that Indian tents were white. They *were* white, being painted with white clay. Alexander Henry, the fur trader, describes them as "white as linen." If Mr. Wells will look at photograps of old hide tipis he can see this for himself. It is true that an old tent became smoked brown and yellow when it had been used through the winter, but the tent itself was normally white.

AS TO pack-mules, having traveled with numerous pack-trains, I can see nothing false in calling them "plodding."

Indians raiding enemy horse-herds often carried empty saddle pads which they stuffed with grass and used to keep from getting sore when making their getaway, as saddles were too heavy to carry, and they generally had to ride for forty-eight hours or so without stopping to get away.

As for the phrase "loping, loping, loping," it is an exact translation of the words used time and again by Chief White Bull when describing the movements of a mounted war party. White Bull had thirty coups himself and ought to know how Indians traveled.

I DO NOT consider that any of the historical events mentioned by Mr. Wells can be called "white invasion" of Sitting Bull's country. A few traders, travelers, and explorers are not invaders. There are Japs in America now, but we do not consider them a menace or as invaders, though some day maybe they will be. It is true that Ashley did some fighting against the Rees and the Sioux helped him, but there had been no real military invasion of Hunkpapa Sioux country when Sitting Bull was born. Sitting Bull's country was not on the Platte, but north of Grand River and the Black Hills, west of the Missouri River.

I think Mr. Wells had better read the reports of the Secretary of War and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1860-1880 before he gets too dog-

matic about intertribal relations and wars. The treaty of Laramie, made in 1851, laid down the boundaries of the different tribes, as accepted by them at that time. But by 1864 the Sioux had scared the Rees and Mandans so badly that these tribes offered to sell their country to Uncle Sam because, they said, they never dared hunt there. The Crows also were chased out of their country, and at one time settled on Milk River, preferring to face the Piegans and Gros Ventres of the Prairie rather than face the Sioux. By the treaty of 1851 the Little Big Horn River was in Crow territory, but somehow or other Custer got killed there by the Sioux. If the Crows had been the conquerors, as Mr. Wells maintains, this couldn't have happened.

AS TO the climate of North Dakota and Montana and its effects upon horse-breeding, it is well known that the tribes to the south had far more horses than those to the north. The Comanches on the Mexican border had so many, in fact, that in 1840 at the treaty of Bent's Fort on the Arkansas, they begged the Cheyennes *not* to give them horses, as they already had more than they could wrangle. So far I have never heard the Sioux complain of having too many horses. In fact it was the lure of horses which caused the southern Cheyennes to go south to live.

Indian ponies had to subsist on cottonwood bark and twigs in winter, and unless somebody got that for them, or gave them hay, they often died in large numbers. The same is true today. In the summer of 1930 I saw stacks of bones of winter-killed horses piled up at railway stations in Dakota, and some of them were as high as a house. If that is a good country to raise horses in, without modern forage and shelter, I'll eat the bones. Bear in mind that when I speak of Sioux I am speaking of Sitting Bull's Sioux, the Hunkpapa, whose home was in North Dakota and Montana.

I KNEW when I wrote this book that a lot of people like Mr. Wells, who had swallowed the old stories for lack of better information, would camp on my trail. It doesn't follow that a few months or years in the West qualify a man to discuss Indian history. I was in France with the A.E.F. myself, but I do not imagine that I know more about the war than a trained historian who has spent years studying the documents. I wish to call Mr. Wells' attention to the "Life and Adventures of Frank Grouard," by DeBarthe. Grouard was captured and adopted by Sitting Bull in '69 and lived in his tent for more than a year. His story tallies closely with the stories told me by old Indians, and he is the only white man of that time who knew Sitting Bull well who has left any record of his impressions. Other accounts of Sitting Bull's early life were mostly hearsay or war propaganda, or propaganda put out with the permission of the Indian Agent during whose term of office Sitting Bull was shot down. Such stories are of very doubtful value. When we talk with a man we have many chances to test his honesty, his knowledge, his ability; but when we read, we listen in the dark.

—STANLEY VESTAL

NOT all British Columbia immune to rattlers, avers this comrade:

Le Mesa, California

I certainly must disagree with Mr. Schmidt of Ask Adventure (in spite of his apparent standing in the field of herpetology) when he makes the statement that the chances of stepping on a rattler in British Columbia are inconceivably remote. Certain parts of British Columbia, yes. Other parts most decidedly, no.

There are many parts of Eastern British Columbia where I have seen and killed more rattlers in many single days than I saw during a seven months' stay in the Colorado Desert of California this last summer, and in a district supposed to be alive with rattlers and sidewinders.

I WOULD like to know also just what Mr. Schmidt calls a large rattler. I certainly saw larger ones in B. C. than I saw this last summer in the desert, in California. In one afternoon and in one locality in B. C, I killed four rattlers, all of which were over five feet in length, and measured twelve inches or better in circumference at the thickest part of the body. If those are not large rattlers, then I would most certainly like to see a large one.

I might state too that in the old freighter days before Jim Hill put in his railroad, there was one place along the B. C.-Washington border known as Rattlesnake Flat, and the residents of the town of Cascade, B. C. used to make Sunday excursions there and have a regular snake drive. It is of record too that on many a Sunday afternoon hundreds of rattlers were killed.

—W. M. KARTZMARK

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Sea

SHIPS, masts and stunsails.

Request:—"1. When were stunsails first used and how extensively were they used?

2. What are the names of the fifth and sixth masts?

3. Does a bark have any advantages over a full-rigged vessel? It seems that most of the later windjammers were barks."

—TOM McDERMOTT, Las Animas, Colorado

Reply, by Captain Dingle:—1. For records giving a definite date for the introduction of any particular piece of ship gear I shall have to refer you to a wider source. I suggest that you write to Thomas Perkins, Salem, Massachusetts, who conducts a very widely known organization devoted to such matters. As for the degree to which stunsails were used, it is fairly certain that from the time they were instituted up to at least the middle eighties nearly every ocean-going, squarerigged ship carried them. It was only when economy decreed cutting down crews that they were discarded and the yards made squarer to partly compensate for their lack. Sailing warships used them to the end.

2. The fifth and sixth masts were usually called the spanker and driver masts, though in some individual instances all the masts were numbered when exceeding four.

3. The bark's advantage over a ship was chiefly the need of fewer men. That is the reason for so many of the older ships being altered to barks by stripping the yards from the mizzen.

Japanese

A FEW phrases of this difficult language ("How much?" "Too dear." "I'll take it.") equip the traveler to travel anywhere in Japan. But learning the ideographs is hard work.

Request:—"Some friends of mine have decided to study the Japanese language and I have undertaken to find out how they should go about it. Any tips you can give us concerning textbooks, where to obtain them, etc, will be appreciated."

—D. M. STEWART, Truro, Nova Scotia

Reply, by Mr. Oscar E. Riley:—McGovern's "Colloquial Japanese" is considered perhaps the best book for a group, such as yours, in undertaking the study of the Japanese language.

For advanced study of Japanese, a more scholarly work is Plaut's "Japanese Conversation-Grammar," $3.00, published by Julius Groos, Heidelberg, 1926.

Your group up in central Nova Scotia will be able to obtain these books from Brentano's, 1 West 47th Street, New York City or from Librairie Hachette, 34 Maiden Lane, London, W.C.2.

The above books are printed throughout in Roman letters. In order to study the Japanese characters, or ideographs, Professor E. Kiyooka of Columbia University, New York, recommends the "Beginners' Japanese Dictionary", by Arthur Rose-Innes, published in Japan and obtainable from Maruzen's, Tokyo.

Most Americans on business in Japan for a three year contract period do not make an attempt to study the Japanese characters, as it requires an excellent memory for an adult to master the 8,500 ideographs to be found in the type fonts of every newspaper. From 9 to 5 daily, they follow the same office routine, doing the same work, as they previously have done in the United States, and use English in their business conversation.

Americans in Japan first learn to read and pronounce numbers up to 100. Next they learn to say in Japanese: "How much is this?" and to understand the price quoted by the shopkeeper. A few phrases such as: "That is too dear," or "I'll take it," and the American resident is equipped to shop anywhere in Japan. Some American guests in Japanese inns hold an English-Japanese phrase book in one hand, and read the appropriate questions directly out of the book.

Missionary workers, on the other hand, expect to spend most of their lives in Japan. Their first year in that country is spent in hard work at the Tokyo Language School, learning conversational Japanese, and also how to read the ideographs found in the Bible and in the vernacular newspapers. At the end of one year they have a good foundation upon which to build a sound speaking and reading knowledge of this difficult language.

Gold Pan

PRACTISE with common sand and bird shot. When you can recover all the shot you're good enough to go after gold.

Request:—"Could you give me a few pointers on using a gold pan?"

—W. V. ERVIN, Longview, Texas

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—To operate a goldpan: Fill pan ¾ full of sand and hold under surface of some quiet pool, shake and jar sides to settle possible gold content. Then comb off larger rocks, scraping off possible mud or clay into pan. Tip pan slightly away from you and give it a rotary motion under water. You'll note the sand and gravel work off over outer lip of pan. Keep up motion, tapping pan at intervals, permitting lighter sands to escape over outer rim, until you have left only a couple (or less) tablespoonsful of black sand or iron. Then leave a tablespoonful only of water in pan and give a circular tilt to cause black sand to string a thin line around inner bottom edge. The gold, if any, will be found dragging back at tail end of sand string. It may need magnifying glass to detect minute grains.

Practise with common sand containing bird-shot; when you can recover all the shot, you're good enough to get out after gold. It's easy to acquire, hard to describe.

Scandinavia

MOTOR laws very like our own.

Request:—"Would there be any difficulty in procuring an automobile driver's license, or permit, in Denmark during a brief tour?"

—W. HANSON, Alhambra, California

Reply, by G. I. Colbron:—You would have no difficulty procuring a driver's permit, either for your own car brought with you, or a hired car. Valid American drivers' licenses are recognized in Denmark for a stay of three months anyway. For longer, a Danish license must be obtained. You are required, however, to get what is called a *"Triptyque"*, a custom's pass for your own car if you take it. For Denmark only this would cost you $35.00, allowing for a stay of twelve months, and including one thousand dollars' worth of Marine Insurance. This the steamship line chosen will procure for you before leaving New York. For touring in more than one country the International Customs Pass costs $50.00, which includes license everywhere and insurance as above.

The *Triptyque* at $35.00, for one country, is good for Denmark, Norway and Sweden, however, as these three countries are united in a customs union of their own.

Further insurance, called Third Party Risk, is demanded in Denmark; and if you take your own car, and should sell it there, the State gets a sale tax. All of which adds to the cost of taking your own car.

Big Game

GUIDES, like doctors, often charge according to ability to pay.

Request:—"1. What are the rates charged by Western mountain guides when escorting deer, bear and lion hunts?

2. What do the meals usually consist of when on a hunting trip?"

—JIM GILMAN, Ruth, California

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—1. There are no standard prices charged for guiding hunting parties. It depends on the kind of outfit required and the kind of country in which the hunting is to be done. Also various guides have varying prices for

the same service. A man starting into the business very often charges less than some other guide who has an established reputation and can more than fill or book his time ahead. A quite usual charge is $1 per head a day for saddle and pack horses, $3 per head for board, $3 to $5 per day for the guide, and the going rate per day for cook and horsewrangler, whatever it is.

Some make no charge for board, but the hunter pays for all subsistence supplies used on the trip by the entire outfit. In fact, this is the usual method in Wyoming and Montana where the hunting is all done by pack outfit. Where the guide has a camp established and guides from a central point, the hunters pay a day rate of $5 to $7 and the guide pays all expenses except the saddlehorse used by the hunter. As I said before, it is an individual matter and there is no standard rate of prices. In fact, I have known some guides who have various prices for the same service rendered, depending on the wealth of their patron.

2. This also depends on the wealth of the patron and is usually determined by agreement between the guide and his party. The question of "grub" is a problem with any guide and it has led to the common practise, among a lot of old-timers, of having the party buy the kind and quantity of grub desired, paying for the cook and his helper where the size of party requires one, and then this delicate question is solved without any kick. There is pretty apt to be kicking where the guide furnishes the chuck. Usually bear and lion hunts are taken at a time of year when deer and other game cannot legally be killed. Therefore the meat problem is one that each guide has to solve for himself. Some do this by having a man and a small pack outfit which make regular trips between the party and town, transporting supplies.

Another instance I recall is where the guide has a small beef pasture rented not far from his central hunting base and butchers his meat as needed. All these questions are local ones and must be solved locally by the guide.

Most parties that can afford a large outfit for a hunt, demand first class table service and are willing to pay for it. Therefore a good camp cook is a necessity and when once found by a guide, is usually a fixture with the outfit. Meat, broiled, fried and stewed, ham and bacon, potatoes and other suitable vegetables, hot bread, doughnuts, cakes and pies, coffee, tea and cocoa, and where demanded soft drinks of various kinds.

The party usually furnishes its own hard liquor, if carried. I have known a few guides who refused to guide parties that required liquor in camp; and one at least was successful at his calling, but he catered only to a certain class. The average sport coming for a hunting trip has his own personal liquor in mind when planning the trip. Most guides, however, make it a practise never to drink when on the job.

Saurian

THE difference between an alligator and a crocodile.

Request:—"1. What is the difference between an alligator and a crocodile?

2. In what part of this country are they found?" —FRANCIS MOHR, Buffalo, New York

Reply, by Mr. Karl P. Schmidt:—1. The differences between crocodiles and alligators are rather technical and, in fact, trivial, so that the two names get transposed in various parts of the world. There are about a dozen species of true crocodiles, of which four occur in tropical America. There are only two kinds of true alligators, one in the southeastern United States and one in China. The alligator has a broad and massive snout, which covers the lower teeth when the mouth is closed. In the crocodiles, the enlarged fourth lower tooth is exposed on each side when the mouth is closed, and the first pair of lower teeth usually pierce the upper jaw; the snout is narrower and more tapering.

2. In this country, the alligator ranges from Texas to North Carolina, scarce now everywhere except in the larger swampy regions. The crocodile is found only in the extreme southern tip of Florida, but the same species is abundant in Cuba and Central America. Crocodiles range along both coasts of Mexico and to northwestern South America, and are very numerous in many regions.

Great Smokies

A PARADISE of scenic beauty, untouched by ax or plow.

Request:—"Please give me some information regarding the fishing and camping in the Great Smokies of Tennessee."

—A. F. WICKHAM, Secaucus, New Jersey

Reply, by Mr. Paul M. Fink:—The Great Smoky Mountains, where a great new National Park is in process of establishment, is, if one is interested in primitive wilderness, the most desirable spot for camping in eastern America. Here are many mountains over 6000 feet in altitude, some of them seldom visited, thousands of acres of timber land that has never been touched by an ax, spots where you can set up your camp and never be disturbed from one week's end to the other. Yet in it there are sufficient trails, with more being constructed, to make most of the points of interest accessible.

These trails, however, are not broad, wide and well marked, but are the forest trails of the backwoods, and one can easily become lost if he does not use care and possess at least the rudiments of woodcraft. And being lost in the depths

of the Smokies may easily become a tragedy, for there are areas that have hardly been explored, and where one, with a sprained ankle or broken leg, might easily die of exhaustion and exposure long before he could be found by a searching party.

But this reference to its grimmer phases is only by way of caution. In the bounds of the National Park area is to be found the very cream of the scenic beauties of the Southern mountains, and you will be amply repaid for your trip.

In the streams are many speckled and rainbow trout, and the supply is being replenished by both Federal and State agencies. Excellent bass fishing can be had in the waters of the Little Tennessee River and its tributaries, particularly in the lakes above the Calderwood, Topoca and Santeetla dams.

Salute

THE President rates 21 guns. Cabinet members are runners-up with 19. Envoys extraordinary and ministers plenipotentiary get only 15.

Request:—"Will you kindly enlighten me as to the number of guns given in salute to the different ranks of officers?

The only one I am sure of is the 21-gun salute to the President."

—W. K. OSBORNE, Retsil, Washington

Reply, by Lieut. F. V. Greene:—The number of guns in the salutes that you ask about are as follows:

	GUNS
The President of the United States, or the president or sovereign or member of the royal family of a foreign country	21
An ex-President of the United States or the Vice-President	21
Ambassadors, members of the Cabinet and the president pro tempore of the Senate	19
The Chief Justice, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, a Committee of Congress, Governors within their respective States or Territories, a Governor-General and the Governor of the Philippine Islands	17
Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Assistant Secretary of War, the Vice-Governor of the Philippine Islands, an Envoy Extraordinary or Minister Plenipotentiary	15
A Minister Resident	13
A Charge d'Affaires	11
A Consul-General to the United States	11
Admiral of the Navy	19
General or Admiral	17
Lieutenant-General or Vice-Admiral	15
Major General or Rear Admiral	13
Brigadier General or Commodore	11

Officers of foreign armies and navies are received with the same honors as those tendered to officers of like rank in our own services.

A return salute to any commanding officer below the rank of flag officer shall be 7 guns.

These honors are decided by international custom and are practically the same in all the navies of the world and a strict observance of them is necessary to avoid any occasion for international misunderstanding that might arise from an omission of any customary honor or salute.

When a ship of the Navy is in a port of a foreign country upon the national holiday of that country, a salute of twenty-one guns is fired at noon of that day.

At every Army post provided with suitable artillery a cannon salute of twenty-one guns, known as a national salute, is fired at noon on Washington's Birthday, February 22nd and on Memorial Day, May 30th; and on Independence Day, July 4th a salute of one gun for each state in the Union is fired.

A national salute of twenty-one guns is fired by every ship in the Navy at noon on Independence Day, July 4th, Washington's Birthday and Memorial Day.

Salutes are fired only between eight in the morning and sundown in the evening.

Salutes may be dispensed with at the personal request of the officers in whose honor they are prescribed.

The following arrangements have been entered into between maritime powers:

1. Salutes to be returned gun for gun—
   - (a) To the national flag upon arrival in a foreign port.
   - (b) To foreign flag officers and commodores when met at sea or in port.
2. Salutes not to be returned—
   - (a) To a President of a Republic, royal personage, or members of royal families, whether on arrival at or departure from a port or upon visiting ships of war.
   - (b) To diplomatic, naval, military, or consular authorities, or to governors, or officers administering a government, whether on arrival at or departure from a port, or when visting ships of war.
   - (c) To foreigners of high distinction on visiting ships of war.
   - (d) Upon occasion of national festivals or anniversaries.

Yucatan

TRIPS are reckoned in days, not miles, in the Mayan jungle.

Request:—"If I were to travel by rail from Progreso, Yucatan, to the railhead at Peto and then strike south toward the Guatemala border, just what conditions of travel would I be up against? What of the water supply?

Would I find the country more or less open, or

covered with jungle growth. If the latter, what trees comprise it principally? Is the country level or rough? What sort of people if any would I come in contact with?

I will appreciate also any information you can give me on the present extent of exploration of the ancient Mayan cities and what prospect there is, if any, of finding still others as yet undiscovered."

—H. LEIGH MACDONALD, Westmoreland, New Hampshire.

Reply, by Mr. W. Russell Sheets:—You should outfit in Merida for everything but mules and a guide. The train leaves early in the morning and arrives at Peto in time to call on the Alcalde (City Mayor) and arrange through him if possible for mules and guide.

Distance in that country is not in terms of miles! How far is so-and-so? One or two or three, or however many it may happen to be, *jornadas.* A *jornada* is a day's travel. None are the same in either length or time! It simply means how many days it will take you to get there, and the length in hours and distance traveled in any one of them is largely determined by the distance between waterholes and nature of terrain and jungle intervening.

The first *jornada* southward will put you on the west bank of Lake Chichankanab, in which you will be disappointed, as it is not nearly the size maps picture it. Your first day south of the lake will put you into the land of monkeys and tropical birds. Trails, if any, will grow dim. Your guide will know the whereabouts of waterholes—it will be days and days before you reach Rio Hondo, the only river in the peninsula. You will find the terrain to be undulating jungle of limestone surface impossible for anything but mules. The forest trees towering above the jungle will be mahogany, cedar and *zapote* (this latter is the chewing gum tree) and "Ramon" which is a sort of cottonwood tree that has very succulent leaves and is the principal forage for the mules. Occasionally, you will come out of the jungle suddenly into what is called a *sabana.* They are strange level grassy plains of a thousand acres or more in extent without a tree! They appear to have been old lake beds.

You may not meet a soul but your own party all of the way into Guatemala, but you might meet chicle gatherers or fleeing revolutionists. There is a remnant of the Maya race along the upper east coast, but you need not fear them if you should meet them. I have never heard of an American meeting with violence down there.

You will be traveling directly into the land I have tried to interest an expedition in exploring for a key to the hieroglyphs of the ancient Mayas. It is the only place undiscovered palaces remain. Just today the press gives an account of a find in an old tomb near Mexico City. Some day I hope a Maya temple will be discovered that will yield us the key to their glyphs.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

WHAT devil's insolence, what diabolic humor fashioned these dread rings? A platinum death's-head, and within it a marvelous miniature painted by a master craftsman. It was as if the evil genius of La Tête De Mort had looked into the twisted souls of his disciples and employed the pictures thereof as passports of his unholy crew! Ruthless, elusive, the band were spreading terror over two continents with their weapons of blackmail and murder. Police and undercover men followed a long and bitter trail, and it led them—nowhere . . . Until Don Everhard, king of gentlemen adventurers, landed in Paris and received secret orders "to join or die!" Begin this thrilling novel by the author of "Days of '49" in this issue.

The Devil's Passport

By GORDON YOUNG

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TALBOT MUNDY

• Has been to hell and back several times. Starting to roam the unfrequented places of the world at 17 . . . 'officially' reported as dead of a poisoned spear wound in German East Africa . . . later again 'certified' dead in Bellevue Hospital, New York City, knocked on the head by gangsters. In the interim . . . England, Germany, India, Tibet, Assam, Burma, South Africa, broke in Cape Town, Australia before the mast on a windjammer, Africa, Northern Abyssinia, Congo Free State, East Africa, The Near East . . . over-Jordan to Damascus, Mexico, Yucatan, Europe . . . Then Mundy took his pen and began to write. Little wonder that same pen never misses fire. His "King of the Khyber Rifles" has long been a classic adventure novel. He holds the record for reprinting in ADVENTURE . . . his "The Soul of a Regiment" having been reprinted four times . . . and still requests for more.

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